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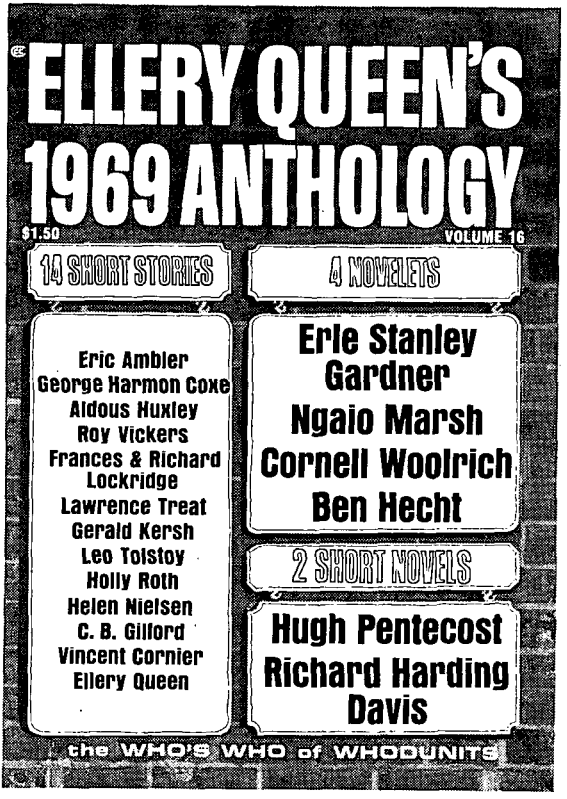

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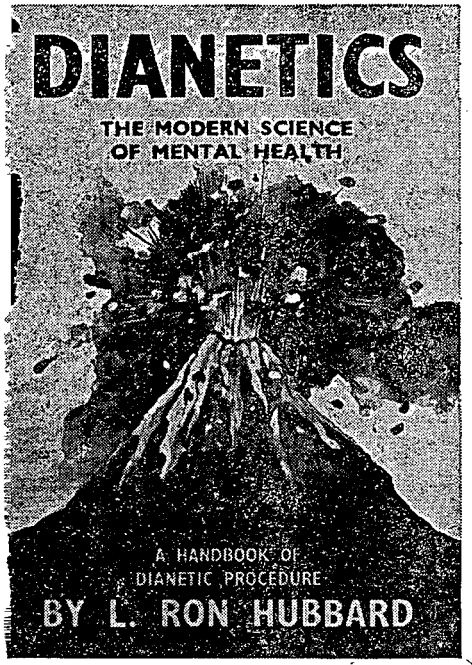

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The W-H-W of the Mystery Story

There are three major divisions of technique in the detective-crime story. First, beginning in 1841 (Edgar Allan Poe), the Whodunit—with primary emphasis on the identity of the criminal—more grammatically speaking, Who *did it? The second, beginning in 1894 with the "medical mystery" (L. T. Meade and Dr. Clifford Halifax), leading up to the scientific detective story (R. Austin Freeman), and becoming the Howdunit—with emphasis on modus operandi —that is,* How *was the crime committed? Third, beginning with psychology in 1910 (William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer), turning psychiatric in 1929 (Harvey J. O'Higgins), and becoming a fully developed trend in the 1930's—from the Whodunit and Howdunit to the Whydunit, with emphasis on criminal motivation—that is,* Why *was the crime committed? Thus, in a nutshell, the W-H-W of the detective-crime-mystery story . . .*

Now, it came to pass, late in the year 1967, that Edward D. Hoch sent in three short-shorts in quick succession, and we could not help noticing that one was primarily a Whodunit, the second a variation of the Howdunit, and the third a perfect example of the Whydunit. Published separately and months apart, this relationship of techniques, this pattern of trends and evolution, would be obscured, if not completely lost; but published together, as a 'tec trio in the same issue, each story would gain extra meaning and the three, as a group, would extend a well-known mathematical dictum. Here, then, is fictional evidence that sometimes the whole is equal to more than the sum of its parts . . .

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WHODUNIT: *Murder Offstage*

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"THERE'S NO OTHER WAY," Garrison Smith said, putting it into words for the first time. "One of us will have to kill him."

Paul Drayer let his eyes shift to the others, seeking their reaction to the words. As he'd expected, Cliff Contrell was already nodding agreement; but most surprising, Aster Martin was offering no objection. She sat at the end of the table in a sort of imperious indifference, as if their decision had no bearing at all on her, as if they were not about to commit murder to protect their good name.

"What do you think, Aster?" Paul asked, fixing her with his deep-set eyes. He wanted her to say it, to take a stand for once in her life.

"I suppose there's nothing else to be done," she answered with studied effect. "You're all in those pictures with me. It's not just my reputation we're talking about."

"Then it's decided," Garrison Smith intoned. Always the director, even when it came to directing a murder. "Which one of us shall it be?"

Cliff Contrell cleared his throat. "What are the appointment times?"

Smith consulted the handwritten notes on the table before him. "Contrell at two o'clock, Drayer at two thirty, and myself at three thirty. He wants $12,500 cash from each of us, in return for the negatives."

"I'm first," Contrell said, "so I guess it's up to me." He was always the leading man in every production, and he wasn't about to yield his position now.

But Paul interjected a word of caution. "How do you know he'll even have the negatives in his office? You might kill him for nothing and then where will we be? Where will Aster be?"

"On the front pages of every paper in the country," Aster answered, but she wasn't joking. "Personally, I don't think any one of you has the guts to kill him, but it's got to be done. You three can't go on paying blackmail forever."

"All right, all right!" Garrison Smith was directing again. "How's this? Contrell shows up at his office at two o'clock this afternoon and pays the $12,500. Then Paul meets him outside and finds out if the negatives are really in the office. If they are, Paul goes upstairs at two thirty, kills our blackmailing friend, and collects both the negatives and Cliff's money."

After a few minutes of discussion it was agreed. "What about me?" Aster Martin asked.

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"You stay here and wait," Smith told her. "You've caused us enough trouble already."

Leonardo Flood was many things to many people. An aging matinee idol, darling of the gossip columnists, king of yesterday's jet set—and clever blackmailer. It was in this last role that Paul Drayer and the others knew him best. When *Morning Five* opened on Broadway and catapulted Aster Martin into overnight stardom, they had all been too busy to give a thought to the pictures, a harmless indiscretion that had been quickly forgotten. Forgotten, that is, by everyone except Leonardo Flood.

He had obtained the negatives—stolen them, really—and telephoned the three men involved: Garrison Smith, the director of *Morning Five;* Cliff Contrell, the male lead; and Paul Drayer, its author. His terms were quite simple—each of them would pay him $12,500 and the negatives would be returned. Otherwise, Broadway's newest darling would be revealed to the columnists as something considerably less than that.

Whatever else they might be, Paul and the other two were loyal to Aster Martin—and to the play, of course. Now, carrying a little .22 automatic in his pocket, Paul Drayer rode the elevator to Flood's dingy office and the 2:30 appointment. It was easily the hottest day of a muggy Manhattan summer, and already the moisture on Paul's brow was evidence that the old building lacked air conditioning.

He walked in on Leonardo Flood without knocking and found the gray-haired man seated in a wooden chair behind a plain wooden desk. There was a filing cabinet in one corner of the room, next to a single closed window, and an electric fan oscillated slowly on top of the cabinet. Otherwise, the room was as bare and dingy as the building itself.

"Ah!" the aging actor greeted him. "The second member of the Aster Martin Fan Club! I'm pleased to see you're punctual. I like my visitors in their proper order."

"I came for the other negatives, Flood," Paul told him.

"Of course! The price is $12,500 from each of you." The actor smiled and adjusted his soiled necktie. "Some girls would almost pay that much to have a nude photo published, I suppose—but then of course our Aster doesn't need that kind of publicity now that she's a star."

Paul showed him the gun. "The negatives, Flood. All the rest of them—no tricks—or you're a dead man. And I'll take Contrell's money while I'm at it."

Leonardo Flood kept smiling. "You mean the Fan Club would kill me for dear, dear Aster? Even that?"

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"The negatives!"

"Suppose I tell you they aren't here?"

"I saw Contrell downstairs. He said you had him wait in the hall and you brought one out to him. I know they're in this room and I want them."

"It'll do you no good to kill me. You'll never find them."

"We'll see," Paul said, and he swung the little gun at Flood's temple, catching the actor with a blow that knocked him unconscious to the grimy floor.

Now he had to work fast. The negatives were on strips of 35mm. film—easy to hide, and not too hard to find. First the body, every inch of it, and the clothes, which yielded Contrell's money but nothing else. Paul checked Flood's necktie, and the soles of his shoes, and everywhere else. He went over every stitch twice, without success.

He tore into the desk next, upending drawers, poking at the legs and sides and back for hidden compartments. He checked the chair legs, and its bottom and back. He searched the meager contents of the filing cabinet, even carefully lifted the whirling black fan to look beneath its base. He opened the window to feel along the ledge and sides. What else? There was no telephone, no closet, not even a coat rack. Flood obviously used the office infrequently.

After twenty minutes Paul gave up. Flood was beginning to regain consciousness, and there was nothing further to be gained—not unless Paul was willing to go the limit and really kill the man. And he wasn't willing to go that far, not even for Aster Martin.

He went out and closed the door behind him.

The street was hot, muggy, and unbearable. He walked a block, then stopped at a corner drug store and drank something cool. At 3:10 by his watch he decided he should call Smith and report failure. But in the phone booth he could get no dial tone.

"What's the matter here?" he asked the counterman.

"The phones are jammed up. We just had a power failure and the whole area's knocked out. All those damned air conditioners!"

Paul sighed and sat down to wait. Fifteen minutes later, the drug store's fluorescent lights flickered back on and the afternoon's minor power crisis was ended. The telephone traffic dropped to normal and he made his call to Smith's office. No one answered. Obviously Smith had gone to keep his 3:30 appointment with Flood.

Paul drove back across town and parked his car in the lot next to the theater. Aster and Cliff were up in the director's office waiting for him, but there was no sign yet of Garrison Smith. "Did you find the negatives?" Aster asked him.

"No. I tore the damned office

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apart and didn't find a thing." He sank into the familiar chair and took out his cigarettes.

"But I know he had them!" Contrell insisted.

"Here's your money. At least I found that." He tossed the thick wad of bills on the table just as Garrison Smith walked in.

Smith was smiling slightly. "You did a nice job, Paul. I didn't think you had it in you."

"What do you mean?" Panic started deep in his stomach.

"Flood's dead, of course. You got him right between the eyes."

Paul Drayer stared at Smith with unbelieving eyes. "I didn't kill him," he said finally. "I knocked him out and searched the place, but didn't find anything. He was still alive when I left."

"Well, he's dead now," Smith said, and nobody doubted him.

"Someone else killed him, then. One of us."

Garrison Smith shrugged. "Does it matter? We're all in this together anyway."

"Maybe it does matter," Paul said. "Maybe it matters a lot. One of us killed Flood and that means one of us has the negatives. As long as that person keeps his secret, he could continue the blackmailing, posing as one of the victims."

"If you think I killed him—" Smith began.

And Cliff Contrell coughed nervously. "It certainly was not me, Paul. You know he was alive when I left him."

"It doesn't make sense," Aster Martin joined in, brushing the hair from her eyes. "How did the killer find the negatives if you couldn't find them, Paul?"

"I don't know," he admitted, speaking slowly. There was something in the back of his mind, something turning . . . "I left Flood, still alive, just before three. Smith's appointment wasn't till three thirty. That leaves a full half hour unaccounted for. If—"

Paul Drayer stopped speaking. The pieces had fallen into place.

"Well?" Smith prodded.

"Look—would a man with as orderly a mind as Leonardo Flood have blackmailed three people for $12,500 each, a total of $37,500? Odd amount for blackmail. Isn't it far more likely there was a fourth victim, and therefore a $50,000 jackpot? A nice round figure . . . That fourth victim could only have been you, Aster."

She gave a little gasp. "Me!"

Paul nodded. He was sure of himself now. "You didn't want us to know, first because of your pride, and second because maybe we'd have wanted you to pay the whole fifty grand. You wanted to seem completely innocent of the thing, especially if it led to murder. But you had an appointment with Leonardo Flood this afternoon too."

"At three o'clock," Contrell breathed.

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"That's right," Paul said. "I got to thinking—why should Flood skip a half hour in his schedule? There were four half hours, and four of us involved. In fact, Flood actually told me he liked his visitors in their proper order. What order? Alphabetical, of course—Contrell at two, Drayer at two thirty, Aster Martin at three, and Smith at three thirty. You were supposed to be waiting here, Aster, but when I phoned at three twenty-five, nobody answered. You were on your way to Flood's office with your blackmail payment."

She smiled at him across the table, still the leading lady. "All right, suppose I did go there? I knew you wouldn't have the guts to kill him, so I went to pay him off. That doesn't prove I killed him."

"I think it does, Aster," he said softly. "Flood always spoke of us as your Fan Club, and I should have caught the hint long ago. The negatives were taped to the blades of his electric fan—in plain view but moving too fast to be seen. You were in the office at three, and there was a power failure in the area about that time. The fan stopped spinning, and you saw the negatives there before your eyes. You shot Flood and took them. Naturally you didn't tell us about it, since we were already set up to take the rap."

"All right," she said finally, wetting her lips with a darting tongue. "Are you going to tell the police?"

Paul Drayer glanced at the other two men and then back at Aster. He was smiling slightly. "If we keep quiet, Aster, what's it worth to you?"

HOWDUNIT: *Every Fifth Man*

You probably wonder why I'm still alive after all that has happened, and I suppose it *is* quite a story. I'd been living and training with the exiles for two years before the attempted coup, knowing—as we all knew—the penalty for failure. There were months of hand-to-hand combat and paratrooper training and even some explosives practice before we were ready for the big day, the day we returned to Constanera.

I'd lived the 25 years of my life in the cities and towns and jungle villages of Costanera. It was my country, worth fighting for, every inch of it. We left with the coming of General Diam, but now we were going back. We would drop

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from the skies by night, join the anti-Diam military, and enter the capital city in triumph.

That was the plan. Somehow it didn't work out that way. The military changed their minds about it, and we jumped from our planes into a withering crossfire from General Diam's forces. More than half of our liberation force of 65 were dead before we reached the ground, and the others were overrun quickly. By nightfall we found ourselves prisoners of the army in the great old fortress overlooking Azul Bay.

There were 23 of us taken prisoner that day, and of these one man—Tomas—had a bad wound in his side. We were crowded into a single large cell at the fortress and left to await our fate. It was hot in there, with the sweat of bodies and a mustiness of air that caught at my throat and threatened to choke me. I wanted to remove my black beret and shirt and stretch out on the hard stone floor, but I did not. Instead I bore it in silence and waited with the others.

A certain custom has existed in the country, a custom which has been observed in revolutions for hundreds of years. Always faced with the problem of the defeated foe, governments had traditionally sent down the order: *Kill every fifth man and release the others.* It was a system of justice tempered with a large degree of mercy, and acted as a deterrent while still allowing something of an opposition party to exist within the country. Of course the eighty percent who were released often regrouped to revolt again, but the threat that hung over them was sometimes enough to pacify their activities.

This, then, was the fate that awaited us—23 prisoners in a gloomy fortress by the blue waters of a bay. We had reason to hope, because most of us had the odds on our side, but we had reckoned without the cold-blooded calculation of General Diam. The order came down early the following morning, and it was read to us through the bars of the cell. It was as we had expected: *Every fifth man will be executed immediately. The remaining prisoners will be released in twenty-four hours.*

But then came the jolting surprise. The officer in charge kept reading, and read the same message four times more. General Diam had sent down five identical executive orders. No one was to survive the executions.

I knew something had to be done, and quickly. As the guards unlocked the cell door I went to the officer in charge. Using my deepest voice I tried to reason with him. "You cannot execute all twenty-three of us. It would be contrary to orders."

He looked down at me with something like scorn. "Be brave, little fellow. Die like a soldier!"

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"But the first order says that every fifth man should be executed immediately. It means just that. They should be executed before you read the second order."

The officer sighed. "What difference does it make? The day will be hot. Who wants to die under the noonday sun? At least now there is a bit of breeze out there."

"You must obey the orders," I insisted. "Each order must be executed separately."

You can see, of course, the reason for my insistence. If the five executive orders were lumped together and carried out at once (as General Diam no doubt intended), all 23 of us would be shot. But if they were carried out separately, the orders would allow nine of us to live. I'd always been good at mathematics, and this was how I figured it—every fifth man would be taken form the original 23, a total of 4, leaving 19. The process would be repeated a second time, killing 3, leaving 16. On the third round another 3 would die, and 13 would be left. Then 2 shot, 11 left. A final 2 shot, and 9 of us would walk out of the fortress as free as the air.

You say the odds were still against me? Not at all—if the officer agreed to my argument, I was certain to survive. Because consider—how would the fifth man be picked each time? Not by drawing straws, for this was the military. We would line up in a single column and count off. And in what order would we line up—alphabetically? Hardly, when they did not even know our names. We would line up in the old military tradition—by height.

And I had already established during the night in the cell that I was the shortest of the 23 prisoners!

If they started the count-off at the short end of the line—which was unlikely—I would always be safe, for I would always be Number One. More likely, they would start at the tall end, and for the 5 count-offs I would always be last—numbers 23, 19, 16, 13, 11, and 9. Never a number divisible by 5—never one of the doomed prisoners!

The officer stared down at me for what seemed an eternity. Finally he glanced through the orders in his hand once more and reached a decision. "All right," he said. "We will carry out the first order."

We lined up in the courtyard—by height—with two men supporting the wounded Tomas, and started the count-off. Of the 23 of us, 4 were marched over to the sea wall and shot. The rest of us tried not to look.

Again—and 3 of our number died against the sea wall. One of the remaining 16 was starting to cry. He had figured out his position in the line.

The officer formally read the third executive order, and 3 more

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went to the wall. I was still last in the line.

After the fourth order 2 of the 13 were marched to their death. Even the firing squad was beginning to look hot and bored. The sun was almost above us. Well, only one more count-off and then 9 of us would be free.

"Wait!" the officer shouted, as the first man began to count off again. I turned my neck in horror. Tomas had fallen from the line and the blood was gushing from his side. He was dead, and the 11 was suddenly reduced to 10.

I was the tenth one as the last count began!

The fifth man stepped out of line—then *six, seven, eight, nine, ten.* I didn't move.

"Come, little fellow," the officer said. "It is your turn now."

You ask how I come to be sitting here, when I was so surely doomed, when my careful figuring had gone for nothing. I stood there in that moment, looking death in the face, and did what I had kept from doing all night and morning. I knew the officer would obey General Diam's order to the letter—to execute every fifth man—and that was what saved me.

I took the beret from my head, let my hair fall to my shoulders, and showed them I was a girl.

WHYDUNIT: *The Nile Cat*

Professor Bouton had never killed a man before, and so was not at all prepared for the blood which spurted from Henry Yardley's shattered head. He was still standing above the bludgeoned body, trying to think how to get the blood from his clothes, when the night security guard walked into the Egyptian Room and found him. After that, there was no point in denying it.

The detective lieutenant, a man named Fritz, was calm and professional, but with tired eyes. He sat across the table from Professor Bouton and spoke to him quietly, as if this sort of murder happened every day in the week. "You admit killing Henry Yardley?" he asked, after checking to make certain the stenographer was ready.

"Oh, yes. I admit it. If that was the poor fellow's name."

"You didn't know his name?"

"I didn't know *him.* I never saw him before in my life."

Lieutenant Fritz looked blank, but only for a moment. "His name was Henry Yardley and he was a

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graduate student at the University, working for his master's degree in archeology. Does that help you?"

"I told you—I never saw him or heard of him before."

Fritz picked up a pencil and began to play with it. "We're not getting anywhere, Professor Bouton. You've admitted the crime—you might as well tell us the motive. Did you two have an argument, a fight?"

"No. We never spoke to each other."

"There are only a limited number of motives for murder—hate, fear, revenge—"

"It was nothing like that."

"—gain—"

"Not really—not gain in your sense of the word."

"This Yardley, was he a queer or something?"

"I have no idea. He was doing nothing, had done nothing to me in the past. As I told you, I had never seen the man, never even heard his name spoken."

The detective put down the pencil and sighed. "You mean, he just walked into the room and you killed him?"

"Exactly."

"Then you must be nuts!"

Professor Bouton was still able to smile, however slightly. "Perhaps all murderers are insane. I am no more so than the rest."

"You had a motive for killing him? And you expected to get away with it?"

"I had a motive, yes. And I did expect somehow to get away with it. Though I must admit I had no plan beyond the murder itself."

"It was premeditated?"

"Yes, within the legal meaning of the word. I thought about it for some minutes before I acted. And now that I'm arrested, nothing is changed. In fact, it may actually be better that it's happening this way."

"Better for whom? Is there a woman involved?"

Professor Bouton smiled once again. "Perhaps I should tell you the entire story, from the beginning. I think you would understand my motive then . . ."

My name—my full name—is Patrick J. Bouton. I have been associated with the University for the past twenty years, most recently as Professor of Middle Eastern Civilizations. One of my duties, and increasingly a chief one, has been to act as curator of the Egyptian Room at the University Museum. This is hardly the British Museum with its room after room of mummies and sarcophagi, but we have a nice little collection. Mainly small statues, Coptic crosses, and a really fine group of scarabs.

The prize of the collection, and the only art object in the entire museum to achieve world-wide renown, is of course the Nile Cat. It's one of several representations

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of Bastet, Goddess of Joy, whose shrine was at Bubastis, in lower Egypt. The statue was found back in the 1920's near the banks of the Nile, and is part of a loan collection belonging to Cadmus Verne, the investment banker.

The Nile Cat is a beautiful thing. twelve inches high and made of bronze, with large ruby eyes set deep into the head. Some art critics have called it the most important single piece of early Egyptian art ever uncovered. The owner has it insured for a quarter of a million dollars, and it's easily worth that amount.

My entire collection—the pieces acquired under my direction—has been built around the Nile Cat, which occupies the largest display case in the Egyptian Room. So you can imagine that what happened two weeks ago was quite a shock to me. Cadmus Verne had given us the loan of the statue for his lifetime, with the provision that his heirs continue the arrangement for as long as they owned the Cat. When Verne died a few months back at the age of 81, I was saddened but not particularly surprised. He had led a full and good life.

No, it was not until two weeks ago that the blow fell. His daughter, a middle-aged matron with no interest in Egyptology, came and told me the news. I'm Mrs. Constance Clark, she said. Cadmus Verne was my father. Oh, yes, it's about the statue—the Nile Cat. My husband and I have decided to withdraw it from your collection and sell it.

Sell it? I suppose my face must have revealed my dismay at her words. Sell it to whom? Where?

The French government has made an offer of $250,000 for the statue, she told me. They want it as the main exhibit in their new museum, opening next month.

Next month! Do you mean—?

I'll be selling it to them in a few weeks, she said. And that was it. There was no appeal from her decision. There could not even be a delay in the negotiations, because the new French museum also had in mind a head of Nefertiti from the National. If the Nile Cat was not available by their opening next month, the offer to Mrs. Clark would be withdrawn and they would buy the head of Nefertiti instead.

She said it and she was gone, leaving me alone with my thoughts. You must realize what those thoughts were. You must realize that I have no other interests in this world but my work. My wife has been dead for many years, and we had no children. Even my hobbies, such as they are, center around this museum and its contents. After years of building it, of making it an important part of the University, I was on the verge of losing my prize exhibit.

Well, I determined not to go

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down without a fight. By the terms of Verne's will, the statue had to remain with us unless it was sold. And I knew that the French offer was a once-in-a-lifetime thing. The Nile Cat might be important to me, and to a new French museum, but there were very few others who would pay that price for it. They didn't need to—the big museums have their own treasures.

One week ago I finally got in touch with the French museum's representative in New York. I pleaded with him, begged him, but to no avail. The statue would be purchased from Mrs. Clark and flown to Paris for the opening. I came back home a broken man.

I think it was then that I decided to murder Mrs. Clark.

Yes, murder. The idea can come to the mildest of men, if the provocation is sufficient. I would kill her and save my precious statue.

But it was not that easy. For one thing, she was traveling now somewhere in the west. For another, her death would accomplish exactly nothing. The statue would still be sold, by her husband, by her family. A quarter of a million dollars is a great deal of money.

I hit upon a second plan, which in many ways was more fantastic than the first. I would buy the statue from her myself, borrowing the money against my salary of $12,000 a year. But of course the bank only laughed at that. I am only six years from compulsory retirement. Where, the bank asked, would I earn the money to repay the loan in six years? Especially with the interest.

So where did that leave me? Last night I walked out to the Egyptian Room and stood for a long time staring at the Nile Cat. I thought of stealing it, of hiding it somewhere until the French offer was withdrawn. But then it would still be gone from my museum, which was where it belonged. And could I ever return it? Mrs. Clark would have collected the insurance, and my problems would have multiplied. Besides, she would immediately guess that I had taken it, and send the police to search my house. I could never bring myself to destroy it, and I lacked the skill to find a really clever hiding place. I do not have a criminal mind.

She called me today from the west coast and said the men would come for it tomorrow morning. This was to be my last night with the beautiful Nile Cat in my museum. I appealed to her again, but of course it was useless. Nothing could be done to save the Nile Cat. Nothing.

I thought about it for a long time. I thought about Cadmus Verne and his middle-aged daughter. I thought about the French museum half a world away. But mostly I thought about the Cat, and how to keep it here.

And then I guess it came to me. Tonight. Just a little while ago. I

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walked into the Egyptian Room and there was only one person in sight—this fellow Yardley. I went over to the display case and unlocked it and took out the Nile Cat and smashed his skull with it . . .

"You see now why I did it?" Professor Bouton asked, looking up from his hands.

"I guess I do," the detective said, very softly.

"My beloved Nile Cat is now a murder weapon—Exhibit A in an investigation and trial. Just the investigation alone would delay its release for weeks. Now that you have me for trial, it will be months before the statue can be returned to this museum. By the time Mrs. Clark can get her hands on it, the French sale will have collapsed. The Nile Cat will rest in my museum forever."

"Yes," the detective said. He motioned to the stenographer and pressed a buzzer on his desk.

"And even though I've confessed, the laws of this state require a plea of Not Guilty in a first-degree murder case. I'll be tried in some months—perhaps I might even appeal my conviction. It could be years before the Nile Cat gets back to her. It could be years . . ."

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the *NEWEST* mystery-suspense story by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

We have linked Charlotte Armstrong's newest story with Patricia Highsmith's newest story, publishing them back to back in the same issue and calling them "A Pair of Strange Stories"—and that they are. Strange, both of them—but utterly different from one another. And yet we have the oddest feeling that in some mysterious and magical way Charlotte Armstrong and Patricia Highsmith started with basically the same conception, with basically the same "germ" of an idea. If that is so—and judge for yourself after you've read both stories—how interesting that the plots should grow and develop so differently, should evolve into such totally different stories . . .

THE LIGHT NEXT DOOR

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

HAVING LOAFED ALL MORNING, Howard Lamboy was improving the holiday afternoon, but Miggs, the dog, thought that raking leaves in the back yard was a jolly game, and a part of the fun for him was to scatter all the piles. After much haranguing, and gesturing with the rake, Howard had just conceded that he was never going to get anywhere until Miggs was banished indoors. He had his hand in the dog's collar when the pouched face of his neighbor poked around the back corner of the garage. It was followed by the thin body, which stationed itself on the other side of the knee-high hedge.

"Hi," said Ralph Sidwell, with his usual gloomy diffidence.

"Oh, hi, Ralph," said Howard. "How's every little thing?" Then he bit his tongue, because the man was a bridegroom, and his bride, whatever else, was certainly not little; and while Howard was filled with normal human curiosity he hadn't meant to be crude.

"Fine," said Ralph absently. "Say, by the way, that dog of yours made off with a pillow from my place. Seen any traces?"

"What?" Miggs was writhing, head to tip of tail, like a line of light on choppy water. Howard let him go and the dog gamboled over

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to the hedge to sniff welcome. The neighbor looked sourly down at the Dalmatian.

"Now, what's all this?" said Howard genially. "What the devil would Miggs want with a pillow? He's got a pillow. No, I haven't seen any traces. What do you mean?"

"Francine," said Ralph coldly, "put a bed pillow out on the back balcony to air and it fell off the railing. Your dog hauled it away."

"I don't believe it," said Howard. "Where is it?"

"That's what I was asking you."

"*Bed* pillow?" Howard was incredulous. "I doubt he'd bury a thing like that, you know."

"Well, it's gone," said Ralph gruffly.

"Well, I'm very sorry," said Howard, "but I don't know a thing about it and neither does my dog."

"How do you know he doesn't?" said Ralph. "My wife saw him."

"She recognized him?" Howard was stiff.

"Black and white spots," said Ralph in triumph.

"Well, well! Only black and white dog in the world, eh? I can tell you, Miggs didn't bring any bed pillow home, and you tell me where else he would have brought it."

"He did *something* with it," said Ralph stubbornly.

"I don't think so," said Howard. "Excuse us, please?"

He grabbed the dog's collar again and dragged Miggs off to the kitchen door.

"What's the matter?" said Stella.

"Oh, boy!" said Howard eloquently.

After a while he told her.

"Okay," Stella said, "Miggs didn't do it. So it's a mistake. But, Howard, what makes you so mad?"

"Aw, it was his attitude."

"In what way?"

"So damned unreasonable."

"Listen, he's only been married two days," said Stella. "It's whatever her little heart desires, for gosh sakes."

"Fine way she's setting up diplomatic relations."

But Stella said, "A second marriage, at their ages, is probably pretty upsetting. Have a little human understanding."

"Well, it's Miggs *I* understand," said Howard. "I know him better, for one thing."

The fact was, he didn't know Ralph Sidwell at all. Howard was 44 years old and his neighbor must be in his middle fifties. Howard preferred to think of this as a whole other generation. Ralph and his first wife, Milly, had been living next door when the Lamboys moved in eight years ago. While the Sidwells had not called, they had been pleasant enough over-the-fence; but the relationship had never become more than a hot-enough-for-you or sure-need-rain sort of thing.

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Milly Sidwell, a personality of no apparent force, had taken a notion to die in the distance, having succumbed, according to the newspaper, while visiting relatives in Ohio. When the widower had returned, without a wife or her body to bury here, the Lamboys had bestirred themselves to make a condolence call. This had evidently either surprised or alarmed the man to the point of striking him dumb. It hadn't been a very satisfactory occasion.

Later Stella had asked him over to dinner, three separate times, which invitations Ralph had refused, as if he couldn't believe his ears, and they must be mad. So the Lamboys had given up. For the last three years Ralph Sidwell had lived alone, next door, taking his meals out somewhere, coming and going with a minimum of contact. The Lamboys, being involved in warm and roaring communication with their neighbors on the other side, didn't miss what they had never had.

Now, suddenly, Ralph had taken unto himself a second wife.

The Lamboys had not been invited to the wedding which, indeed, scarcely seemed to have been a social occasion. Wednesday morning (only yesterday), Ralph had been standing in his own driveway when Howard drove out; Ralph had hailed him, and had announced, rather stiffly, that he had been married on his lunch hour the day before. He wanted the Lamboys to meet the bride.

Howard had shut off his motor and got out of the car in honor of the news. (The least he could do!) Stella had come running out in her morning garb of robe and apron, and Francine Sidwell—the widow Noble, that was—had come out of her kitchen to be presented.

She had been dressed neatly. (Stella confessed later that she had felt mortified, herself.) But there was no better word for Francine than "fat"—unless it was "enormous."

Stella reported that after Howard had driven off to his office they had told her that they had first met in a laundromat. "She's a marvelous cook," Ralph had said, and that was the end of the conversation.

Although Stella said mischievously that probably Ralph only wanted to make sure they didn't think he was living in sin, she was prepared to accept and adopt a neighborly approach. But it was only right to let them severely alone for "a while"—a period that would correspond to the honeymoon they evidently were not going on.

This was only Thursday. Howard was thinking, with human understanding, that a second "honeymoon" might not be all honey when Miggs, that lovable clown, placed his jaw in warm devotion on Howard's ankle. "That's my fella," said Howard. "Love me, love my dog."

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This wasn't what he meant. He didn't expect the Sidwells to *love* him, but they ought to notice what *he* loved.

On Saturday, Howard was out, moseying along the line of the scraggly hedge between the lots and wondering what the hedge disliked about its situation, when Ralph Sidwell came out of his own back door, marching, to accost him.

"Now," he said, with no other preliminary, "you are going to have to tie that dog up." He pointed at Miggs, whose name he ought to know perfectly well, with a shaking finger. "We have a right," he sputtered, "to hang anything we like on our own clothesline and have it safe. Your dog—"

"His name," said Howard coolly, "is Miggs."

"Your stupid animal," said Ralph, "has taken my great-grandmother's patchwork quilt! And that's a priceless heirloom! It can't be replaced." He was shouting. "My great-grandmother made it when she was a *girl!*"

"Hold it," said Howard. "Now calm down, will you?"

"By *hand*!" yelled the neighbor.

"Listen, I'm sure she did," said Howard. "But what has that got to do with Miggs? He wouldn't take a quilt off your clothesline."

"If he didn't, who did?"

"How would I know? I suppose your wife saw him again? She must have spots before her eyes."

"Don't you insult my wife!"

"Then quit insulting my dog."

"Where is my great-grandmother's quilt?"

"I haven't the faintest idea and I couldn't care less!"

Miggs, getting into the spirit of things, began to growl. Stella came running out of the house. "What are you bellowing about?"

By now Howard was speechless. Ralph was still pointing at Miggs.

"Oh, honey?" Out of the back door of the other house (identical in floor plan except that right was left) came the bride. Francine was hurrying and her flesh jiggled and bounced. She had in her arms a patchwork quilt, all blues and whites and greens. "Oh, honey," she panted. "Look, I found it. It's all right, I found it."

"Well!" said Ralph hotly. He turned and gave Howard a hard glare. The look said: Don't you dare say I shouldn't have been so mad at you, because I am *still* mad.

Miggs, who understood hostility in every language, even the silent ones, barked, and Francine clutched the quilt and began to walk backward. (Was she afraid?) Howard rose in his wrath and simply strode past the hedge. "Let me see that," he demanded.

Francine screamed lightly.

"Hey, Miggs, whoa!" cried Stella, grabbing the dog's collar and hanging on with all her weight.

Ralph Sidwell said, "Don't touch it. That's *mine*."

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"Yours, your great-grandmother," yelled Howard. "You show me my dog's toothmarks or his claw prints or *any* evidence—" He snatched up the quilt by a corner. It was a lovely old thing, on the fragile side. Francine kept backing away, and Howard had to let go to keep from tearing the treasure. "For your information," he howled, "*my* dog doesn't eat tomatoes."

"Okay, I apologize," Ralph screeched, as angrily as he could.

"Oh, honey, I'm sorry," Francine was saying to her bridegroom. (She was afraid?) "Oh, listen, Mrs. Lamboy, I'm so sorry—"

Stella bent her head as if she were the Queen and Francine the commoner. "Come, Miggs. Come, Howard," she said, rounding up her own fierce creatures.

They persuaded Miggs into the house. Howard flung himself down in his den and poured some beer and did it wrong and caused too big a head and swore and blew out his breath in a long "Whew!" The dog lay down at his feet and thumped the floor with his tail, waiting for praise. "That's right, pal," said Howard. "You didn't do it, did you? Darn idiots!"

Stella was cooling off, by herself, in the kitchen, and it didn't take her long. She came in and said, "We're not going to have this, you know."

"Darned right."

"I mean we're not going to have any feud on," she said grimly. "Of all the miserable things in this world a feud with neighbors is the stupidest. And *we* are not going to have one."

"Okay. Let them lay off my dog."

"What's this 'my dog' all the time?" she said. "He's my dog too, and I love him dearly, and I know he's not guilty, as well as you do. But I am not going to get into a silly fight with neighbors. Ralph apologized."

"Yeah, some apology," Howard scoffed. But he saw her point. He wasn't really as childish as this. So it was agreed that Stella would call on her neighbor, as soon as seemed correct, and—well, just do the right thing and *be* neighborly.

So on Monday morning, Howard being at work, Stella made a luscious pie. She phoned Mrs. Sidwell and announced that she would like to come over and call. Would three o'clock be all right? Francine, in a fluster, said it would, of course.

So Stella dressed herself nicely, but not too formally, and went down her own front walk and around on the public sidewalk to the neighbor's walk and up to their front door and rang the bell. She had been in this house only once before. She had no way to assess what changes the new mistress may have made in the décor or the atmosphere. The house was neat to the point of seeming bare. It "felt"

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like a man's house. But Ralph was not there.

Francine had dressed herself more or less "up" for company. She made exclamations over the high pie, delicate under its burden of whipped cream. She took Stella into the dining room and produced coffee with which she served generous portions of the peace offering. Stella, eating her own pie (and she wished she didn't have to because *she* did count calories), made the normal approaches.

The weather. Bright days. Cool nights. How long the Lamboys had lived here. That they had a daughter away at college. Just the one child. That the houses were small but comfortable, weren't they? A development, yes. You would hardly know any more that they were all alike, what with each owner using paint and trellis, shrub and vine, in an individual way. This had always delighted Stella. But Francine wanted, she said, the recipe.

Oh? Stella recited the recipe for her pie. And how did Mrs. Sidwell like the neighborhood?

Well, Francine thought it was very nice and the house was very nice and the market was very convenient and the pie was *delicious!* Oh, yes, she had been a widow for some years, all alone, yes, and she *was* enjoying this pie. Would Mrs. Lamboy take another piece? No? Then Mrs. Sidwell would.

Stella, smiling and murmuring, watched and listened and thought to herself: No wonder she's so fat! She also was getting a strange impression that the woman beside her was, in truth, a gaunt starving creature, and the flesh in which she was wrapped was a blanket to keep cold bones from shaking apart—an insulation to keep fine drawn nerves from splitting and shattering at the slightest sensation. But everything was going smoothly, on the surface, so Stella brought up the matter of the quilt.

She was so glad it had been neither lost nor damaged.

Francine said, "I washed and ironed it and it's as good as new."

This seemed to Stella to be an odd way to speak of an antique, but she went on to deplore any misunderstanding about the dog. "We know his habits so well, you see. He is really a harmless old fellow. Wonderful with children. Oh, *he* loves *everybody,* including burglars, I'm afraid. Of course, maybe you are a cat person? I seem to remember Mrs. Sid- Oh, I'm sorry."

Francine was staring at her. Her features were lost in the rounded flesh. It was hard to imagine what kind of nose or chin she had. But her eyes were peering out of their rosy nests, and surely there was fear in them.

"All I meant," said Stella, "some people adore cats and can't stand —" (She hadn't meant to mention the first Mrs. Sidwell—she must be more careful.)

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"I don't care for pets, not much," said Francine and stuffed and totally filled her mouth with whipped cream.

After a decently brief interval Stella went home, thoughtful and a little dismayed. She told Howard at dinnertime that there was now peace, and for pity's sake not to break it. Because peace, she went on to confide, was about all there could ever be between Stella Lamboy and the woman next door.

"It's not that I don't *like* her," Stella said. "It's just that I didn't find one thing—there's just no—Well, maybe it isn't fair after only fifteen minutes but there wasn't *one* spark! The only thing she seems to care about is food. She didn't want to know what I care about."

"Obviously," said Howard, "she doesn't care about being fashionably slim."

Stella shuddered and wondered why she did. "She admitted she doesn't care much for pets," she said. "But she's not—well, aggressive about it."

"Miggs can coexist," said Howard loftily, "as long as there is no aggression from out across the border."

But he was thinking: Who would spill tomato juice on an antique patchwork quilt? Or was it something else that I saw on it? The color of—blood? He shivered at such nonsense.

That night Howard got himself trapped in the Late Show. When he took Miggs out on his leash it was after midnight. The street was quiet; the tweedy dark was fresh and cool. As he ambled down the block, with the dog's eager life tugging, kitelike, on the leash in his hand, Howard fell into what he sometimes called, to himself, his "cosmic" thoughts.

Suburban, ordinary, these undistinguished rows of boxes, set among the trees, all silent now. What have we here, he mused. Everything commonplace. You betcha! *Commonplace* stuff—like birth, death, love, hate, fear, hope. In his imagination he could lift the lids from some of these boxes, lift them right off. He knew one box that held patient suffering, another that rang with music all day long. He couldn't help telling himself that every box on the street was a package of human mystery—which was quite commonplace, he thought complacently.

When he turned at the end of the block it was his fancy to cross over and come back on the other side of the street. Suddenly, in the upper story of the house next door to his—the Sidwells'—he seemed to see a wash of light. No room lit up. But something paler than the dark had washed along the windows from the inside. Burglars, he thought at once. There it went again. Howard began to walk on his toes, although now

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the house remained dark, and Miggs hadn't noticed anything.

Howard crept on until he was directly across from the Sidwell house and there, again, came that washing light, from inside, but now on the ground floor.

He hauled on the leash and struck across to his own house, keeping an uneasy eye to his right. Stella was asleep in her bed, trusting and innocent and *alone*. He must be careful. But his own house seemed to breathe in peace, so he stood quietly on his own porch until Miggs whined a question. Then he unlocked the door and took the dog in.

Miggs curled around on his own cushion in the kitchen and Howard patted the freshened fur, meanwhile peering out the window. There *was* a light of some sort in the kitchen over there, across the two driveways. But there was a shade, or drawn curtains. He couldn't quite see in. And he couldn't hear anything.

Nothing was happening. No more mysterious glimmers.

Finally, Howard locked all his doors and went up to bed. But he kept his ear on the night, until he remembered there was a better ear than his, downstairs.

The next morning, as Howard went to get out his car, he heard a futile whirring and whining in the Sidwells' garage. So he leaned over the hedge. "Trouble?"

It seemed that Ralph was going to work (so much for honeymoons!) but his darned battery—He wasn't going to drive Francine's old crate, either. So Howard offered him a lift. They discovered a useful coincidence of routes, Ralph ran into his house to give Francine his Auto Club card, then got in beside Howard, breathless and grateful.

Ralph worked for the Gas Company. He'd get home all right. A fellow worker lived not too far from here.

"Say," said Howard after a while, "anybody prowling around in your house last night?"

"What?"

"Well, I just happened to be walking the dog. Wondered if you had a burglar," Howard went on cheerfully.

"I wake up once or twice," said Ralph, bristling. "I'd know if we had a burglar."

Howard felt sheepish. "Well, I was really wondering if anybody felt sick. You know, had to get up and take medicine or something?"

"Not at all," said Ralph angrily.

Howard was sorry he had said anything. Whatever intimate ceremonies might take place at night in his neighbor's house were *not* his business. He said, "Maybe you ought to keep a dog. I was thinking, last night, he'd hear the softest burglar in the world. Trouble is, you take Miggs, he's all the time

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hearing things no man can *ever* hear. This can be upsetting, too."

"I am not," said Ralph furiously, "superstitious. And I don't intend to get that way, either."

Howard judged it best to change the subject.

He said to his wife that evening, "They're bugging me."

"Who are?"

"Next door. I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"I don't know *anything.*" Howard stared at her somewhat hostilely, because he was feeling foolish. "I don't know what he meant by 'superstitious.' And there's something else I can't get out of my head."

"So put it into mine," she invited.

"It bugs me that I saw a red stain of some kind on that quilt."

"*What* kind?" she said.

"Okay," he confessed. "You know the classics. Ever think of this? How do we know what *really* happened to Milly Sidwell?"

When Stella did not laugh it occurred to Howard, with a familiar surprise, that he loved her very much, darned if he didn't. She said in a minute, "I don't see how he could have buried Milly in his back yard without *Miggs* knowing all about it, do you?"

"That's right," said Howard, relaxing.

"Of course, in the cellar—" She raised an eyebrow at him.

"They've got no cellar," said Howard at once. All these little houses sat on concrete slabs. There were no cellars. Howard could think of nowhere to hide a body in *his* house, so he felt cheered.

"Anyhow, that's silly," Stella said indulgently, now that he was cheered. And then she added, "Ralph didn't *care* enough about Milly to murder her." She hoped he wouldn't want her to explain. She wasn't sure she could.

But Howard said, "I'll tell you what, Stell. Why don't we ask them over for a barbecue on Sunday? Out in the back yard? Real informal?"

"Why?" she asked calmly, trusting him to know that she was only wondering, not saying "No."

"Because," he answered, "they bug me."

"Me, too," said Stella in a minute.

Stella extended the invitation over the phone, coaxed a little, saying that it was right next door, just the four of them, no special trouble would be gone to, everything very informal, just wear any old clothes. Howard was very good with steaks on charcoal. Francine said she would ask Ralph.

On Wednesday morning, when Howard appeared, Ralph was backing out his revived vehicle. He stopped. "Say, Howard?"

"Yeah?"

"Listen, Francine would like to

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come over on Sunday. The only thing—"

"Yeah?"

"I'm wondering, could you lock up your dog?"

"What do you mean, lock him up?"

"Well, Francine, she's nervous about coming over. She's afraid, I guess, of dogs."

"Well," said Howard, "Miggs isn't going to think much of the idea, but sure, he can stay in the house. You come along over, both of you."

So the invitation was accepted.

Sure enough, on Sunday, Miggs saw no reason to conceal his anguish at being incarcerated while something interesting was going on behind the house. Howard and Stella did their best, carrying trays of food out to the redwood table, lighting the candles in their glass globes, offering drinks and tidbits, Howard fussing over his coals.

The guests didn't help. The meal was uncomfortable, speech stiff, dull, pumped up. No spark, as Stella had said before. Ralph was an unresponsive man, Howard decided. That was a good word for him. He seemed to be locked up inside himself. Lonely, you could say. As for Francine, she ate well.

When it was time for dessert, Howard went into the kitchen with a trayload of dirty dishes. Under full instructions he was trusted to return with a trayload of sweets, the ice cream and cake, while Stella poured the coffee and kept the lame talk limping along.

Howard stood over the sink, rinsing off the plates while he was at it, with Miggs coiling and curling around his legs. Begging and apologizing. Whatever I did to offend you, forgive me? Please, I would so like to come to the party?

Howard felt bad about this. He couldn't explain, could he? Staring out into the deepening dusk he saw, across the two driveways, that wash of light in the upper story. He stepped nimbly to his own back door and called, "Oh, Ralph, could you come here a minute?"

When Ralph came in, to be greeted with delight by Miggs (in whose opinion things were looking up), Howard was standing quietly by the sink. "I just saw something funny in your house. Same as I saw before. Come and look."

The older man was the shorter. He came up beside Howard. His head, at Howard's shoulder, was held in tension. Nothing happened for a moment or two.

"Well, I guess," said Howard, "it's like your tooth won't ache at the dentist's."

Then the light happened again.

Miggs began to bark suddenly. "Listen, Miggs, shut up, will you?" shouted Howard. Ralph was pushing against the sink. But his mood was not what Howard expected. "*You* saw something funny?" Ralph said firmly, when the dog

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was quiet. "*You're* not having hallucinations, are you? So whatever it was is real?"

"Whatever it is," said Howard cautiously.

But Ralph went rushing out the back door and Miggs tumbled after. Howard hurried to follow and saw the man jogging on the grass toward the candlelit picnic table with the dog bounding in pursuit.

Francine screamed in terror.

Howard swooped to catch the dog, and Stella began to soothe, and Ralph sat down.

When the noise and confusion had abated, Ralph said to his wife, "*He* just saw something funny. So now you tell *him* he's being haunted."

Francine began to cry. The oddest thing was that in the midst of her bawling she took up a piece of roll, buttered it, and stuffed it into her mouth.

"What's the matter?" cried Stella. "What did you see?"

"I don't know. Some car's headlight, maybe," said Ralph contemptuously, "but *she* says my house is haunted. She thinks we've got a ghost in there. Listen, I thought I heard something funny, a couple of times. But she didn't hear it, so she said that whatever is there must be haunting *me*. She said it must be Milly—Milly not wanting another woman in her house."

"Oh, come on," said Stella.

"Really!" She was shocked, not so much by the idea of the supernatural as by the husband's ruthless betrayal of his wife.

"Well, I don't know," Francine was sobbing. "I don't know. I don't know."

Howard said, "Why don't we take Miggs over there? I told you, dogs can sense things out of our range. If *he* says it's okay, you can relax."

"No," yelled Francine. She stood up. Her great bulk, in the growing darkness, was uncanny. "No," she screamed. "I won't *have* a dog in the house. No!"

Miggs, who knew somehow that he was being insulted, replied in kind. So Howard dragged him back to his kitchen prison. What the hell, he was saying to himself. The worst of it was, he couldn't help thinking it might *be* hell.

The party was now definitely over. Francine kept blubbering and Ralph Sidwell was in a rage. He seemed to be a man who cast out whatever anger he felt, to ripple off on all sides, fall where it may. He seemed to be angry with the Lamboys. So the Sidwells went home.

Howard, stubborn to be kind whether they liked it or not, walked with them to the front sidewalk. Something made him say to them, "If you need any help, any time, just remember, will you? Here I am, right next door."

But they left without answering.

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In the back yard Stella stood among the ruins. Howard went to let the dog out. Miggs raced around joyously for sixty seconds. He had been forgiven? That was fine with him. All was well.

But it wasn't.

The Lamboys ate dessert indoors. They didn't talk much. Stella could not be rid of the impression that somewhere beneath Francine's flesh there was a small, frail, and very frightened woman who had *not* been afraid of the dog. Stella was almost sure now that Francine hadn't wanted to come at all. But Ralph, unable to read the crooked signal of a false excuse, had fixed it so that she'd had to come. But what *was* she afraid of?

Howard kept wondering about that light, and what it had really been, and why Ralph had seemed, at first glad, and then angry, that somebody else had "seen something funny." What was Ralph afraid of?

Bedtime came and Howard let Miggs out briefly (no walk tonight), then checked the house and climbed upstairs. He went into their daughter's room that was always waiting for her, silent, vacant, but in sweet order. It was on the side toward the Sidwells. He looked out. The house over there had a light on somewhere—on the other side, downstairs—but as far as he could tell, all was peaceful.

Howard gave the whole thing up and dropped into bed.

At one o'clock in the morning the Lamboys' front doorbell rang and kept ringing in the manner that says *panic*. Howard leaped up, put on his robe and slippers, ran his hand over his rumpled hair, and went steadily down the stairs. Miggs, naturally, was curious too, and Howard could not but feel glad that the dog came to press his weight against his master's leg.

The porchlight fell on the white face of Ralph Sidwell. He was fully dressed. He said, "I'm afraid."

"What seems to be the trouble?" asked Howard quietly.

"I heard her scream. I think she — I don't— I'm afraid to go and see."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs. I— Well, we had a fight. I couldn't— I didn't want to go up to bed. Then I heard the scream. I don't know what to do."

"I'll come with you," said Howard. "We'll take the dog. Let me get his leash."

Stella was halfway down the stairs and had heard. Howard snapped the leash on Miggs's collar. He took his flashlight thinking of it vaguely as a weapon. But the weapon he relied on was the dog.

Ralph Sidwell could hardly stand on his puny legs. "I don't know if I c-can." His jaw shook.

Stella said, "We'll follow, Howard. You go and see." She bent in womanly compassion to this trouble. Howard walked toward whatever the trouble was, over there.

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Strange night. The street was quiet. The little boxes stood in rows among the softly sighing trees, and how many civilizations —the insects, the little creeping creatures, the birds, the dogs and cats, and what others unknown— were coexisting all around the little boxes?

Howard went around the walks and up to his neighbor's box, the door of which stood wide open. He entered cautiously. The dog, keeping close, was silent.

He called out, "Francine? Francine?"

There was no answer. The lights were on in the living room to his right. The room was empty. The rest of the downstairs seemed dark and quiet. Howard led the dog toward other doors. He knew the floor plan. But Miggs made no sound.

So Howard started up the stairs. The dog, seeming nervous now, crowded him toward the railing. The upper-hall light switch was in a familiar place. Howard flicked it on and saw a pale blue mound on the floor.

Francine seemed neither conscious nor unconscious. She moaned but did not speak. She was bleeding from a scalp wound.

The ladder to the attic, that hinged from the hall ceiling, was down, and the square hole in the attic floor gaped open. Darkness lay beyond it. Howard's neck hair stirred. He didn't want to climb that ladder and turn his flashlight into that darkness. Wiser to check elsewhere first?

Now Miggs began to growl. Howard turned nervously and heard Stella's voice below. So he called down, "She's been hurt," keeping his voice not too loud, because more ears might be listening than he knew. "Not too badly, I think. Don't come up yet."

"Shall I call a doctor?" said his wife's clear voice.

"Good idea. Or else—no, wait."

Miggs was still growling and doing a kind of dance, advance and retreat, advance and retreat. "In here, eh?" said Howard to the dog. He pushed on the door of the back upstairs room that, in his house, was Stella's sewing room. It was a bedroom here.

Howard whipped the beam of his flashlight around the four walls. Nothing. No one. There was no clothes closet, so nobody could be hiding behind another door. Behind the door he'd come through? Howard shoved it flat against the wall. Nothing.

It was Miggs who saved his reason. (He said so later.)

Howard walked into the small room that seemed so empty. The dog went with him. But the dog *knew*. And the dog rushed and skittered, advanced and retreated, and his knowing muzzle, questing, knew *where*. So that when a hand of thin bone came out from under the bedspread's fringe and took

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Howard by his bare ankle, Howard did *not* fly up to the ceiling or out of his wits.

Oh, he jumped. But Miggs went at once into an uproar. So Howard, sheltered by the noise, dared to crouch and send the light under the bed and into a face—a face the like of which he had never seen before.

"Guard. Stay." he said to Miggs, kindly but firmly, "Good boy. On guard."

He went into the hall. Francine, huge in her pale blue robes, had lifted herself on one arm; her other hand was on her bloody forehead. "Lester?" she said, in a childish piping.

Howard called down the stairs to Stella. "Call the police, hon. That's quickest." Then he looked at Francine.

"My baby? My boy?" said Francine, making everything a question, as if she were sure of nothing. "Never right? Nobody knew? Hungry? Ladder? Hit me?" Her bulk seemed to shake and then flow back down to the floor.

Stella was already on the phone. At the bottom of the stairs Ralph Sidwell was staring up at his neighbor.

"We have a problem here," said Howard quietly. "You've had a kind of stowaway, I think."

He went back to where Miggs was. The dog backed off, obeying. Slowly Howard persuaded the creature out from under the bed. A boy? Anywhere from fourteen to twenty-four. Who could say? He was deformed and stunted, wire-thin, incredibly pale, almost witless. He did not know how to stand up. He clung to the floor like a spider.

People came . . .

It was 3:30 in the morning when the Lamboys returned home at last. Stella said it was unthinkable to go to bed without breakfast and set to work creating homely scents of coffee and bacon.

Howard sat down on the dinette bench and Miggs jumped enthusiastically beside him. This was forbidden, but Howard was in no mood to scold.

"How did she ever sneak the Thing into the attic?" he said, because he was too filled with horror and pity to mention feelings: the brain was safer. "That's where the pillow was. She made a mistake about the quilt, eh? What do you know about that candle! Dangerous, whew! That alone!" (Alone, he thought, a living thing, ever alone, alone.) "She'd have to bring its food by night, on Sundays. But last night Ralph wouldn't go to bed. The ladder hit her."

Stella said sternly, "*Her* shame. So hide it and everything is dandy. And when the money is running out, go after some ordinary lonely man."

"What did *he* want? Home cooking?" said Howard as sternly as she. "How come he didn't no-

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tice this woman was sick and off the beam—*'way* off, and so desperate. If it wasn't in his mind to pay any attention to her or to help her—"

In a moment Stella sat down and said, "If you're off, so far, and always getting farther, you'd have to have some little tiny pleasure. Something sweet in your mouth, at least?" She held her cheeks. They were feeling hollow.

Howard was thinking: In how many little boxes are there people, locked up, all alone, and in how many different ways? And how should we know? And what could we do? And why should that be?

Miggs was licking his master's left ear. We love. We love? And here we are together. So all is well. All is well?

Howard put his arm around the meat of Miggs, this warm loving creature who gave his heart in trust, even unto another species. "Miggs," he said, "what happens to people shouldn't happen to a dog." And he snuggled into the live fur.

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the *NEWEST* mystery-suspense story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Yes, in some indefinable way, we think there is an affinity between Charlotte Armstrong's "The Light Next Door" and Patricia Highsmith's "The Empty Birdhouse." But while somehow, somewhere in the obscure origins of both stories there is a basic idea in common, a conceptual sameness, you will now discover one reason why the two stories turned out to be so completely different. In Charlotte Armstrong's story, as you now know, the Thing is not revealed until the end; but in Patricia Highsmith's story, the Thing is revealed at the beginning. Both methods are valid, and both produce frissons d'horreur that will remain with you perhaps long after you've finished reading the stories.

And both stories have something else in common. A trick of the eye. A trick of the mind. Life is full of tricks of the eye and of the mind. And these tricks—do they expose or conceal the "many civilizations—the insects, the little creeping creatures, the birds, the dogs and cats, and what others unknown—coexisting all around the little boxes" we call houses (quoted from Charlotte Armstrong's story)? These tricks of the eye and the mind—do they expose or conceal "the dark and frightening gorge of the past," the guilts, the crimes (quoted from Patricia Highsmith's story)? These tricks—reader, beware . . .

THE EMPTY BIRDHOUSE

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

THE FIRST TIME EDITH SAW IT she laughed, not believing her eyes.

She stepped to one side and looked again; it was still there, but a bit dimmer. A squirrel-like face—but demonic in its intensity—looked out at her from the round hole in the birdhouse. An illusion, of course, something to do with shadows, or a knot in the wood of the back wall of the birdhouse. The sunlight fell plain on the six-by-nine-inch birdhouse in the corner

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made by the toolshed and the brick wall of the garden. Edith went closer, until she was only ten feet away. The face disappeared.

That was funny, she thought as she went back into the cottage. She would have to tell Charles tonight.

But she forgot to tell Charles.

Three days later she saw the face again. This time she was straightening up after having set two empty milk bottles on the back doorstep. A pair of beady black eyes looked out at her, straight and level, from the birdhouse, and they appeared to be surrounded by brownish fur. Edith flinched, then stood rigid. She thought she saw two rounded ears, a mouth that was neither animal nor bird, simply grim and cruel.

But she knew that the birdhouse was empty. The bluetit family had flown away weeks ago, and it had been a narrow squeak for the baby bluetits as the Masons' cat next door had been interested; the cat could reach the hole from the toolshed roof with a paw, and Charles had made the hole a trifle too big for bluetits. But Edith and Charles had staved Jonathan off until the birds were well away. Afterward, days later, Charles had taken the birdhouse down—it hung like a picture on a wire from a nail—and shaken it to make sure no debris was inside. Bluetits might nest a second time, he said. But they hadn't as yet—Edith was sure because she had kept watching.

And squirrels never nested in birdhouses. Or did they? At any rate, there were no squirrels around. Rats? They would never choose a birdhouse for a home. How could they get in, anyway, without flying?

While these thoughts went through Edith's mind, she stared at the intense brown face, and the piercing black eyes stared back at her.

"I'll simply go and see what it is," Edith thought, and stepped onto the path that led to the toolshed. But she went only three paces and stopped. She didn't want to touch the birdhouse and get bitten—maybe by a dirty rodent's tooth. She'd tell Charles tonight. But now that she was closer, the thing was still there, clearer than ever. It wasn't an optical illusion.

Her husband Charles Beaufort, a computing engineer, worked at a plant eight miles from where they lived. He frowned slightly and smiled when Edith told him what she had seen. "Really?" he said.

"I *may* be wrong. I wish you'd shake the thing again and see if there's anything in it," Edith said, smiling herself now, though her tone was earnest.

"All right, I will," Charles said quickly, then began to talk of something else. They were then in the middle of dinner.

Edith had to remind him when they were putting the dishes into the washing machine. She want-

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ed him to look before it became dark. So Charles went out, and Edith stood on the doorstep, watching. Charles tapped on the birdhouse, listened with one ear cocked. He took the birdhouse down from the nail, shook it, then slowly tipped it so the hole was on the bottom. He shook it again.

"Absolutely nothing," he called to Edith, "Not even a piece of straw." He smiled broadly at his wife and hung the birdhouse back on the nail. "I wonder what you could've seen? You hadn't had a couple of Scotches, had you?"

"*No.* I described it to you." Edith felt suddenly blank, deprived of something. "It had a head a little larger than a squirrel's, beady black eyes, and a sort of serious mouth."

"Serious mouth!" Charles put his head back and laughed as he came back into the house.

"A tense mouth. It had a grim look," Edith said positively.

But she said nothing else about it. They sat in the living room, Charles looking over the newspaper, then opening his folder of reports from the office. Edith had a catalogue and was trying to choose a tile pattern for the kitchen wall. Blue and white, or pink and white and blue? She was not in a mood to decide, and Charles was never a help, always saying agreeably, "Whatever you like is all right with me."

Edith was 34. She and Charles had been married seven years. In the second year of their marriage Edith had lost the child she was carrying. She had lost it rather deliberately, being in a panic about giving birth. That was to say, her fall down the stairs had been rather on purpose, if she were willing to admit it, but the miscarriage had been put down as the result of an accident. She had never tried to have another child, and she and Charles had never even discussed it.

She considered herself and Charles a happy couple. Charles was doing well with Pan-Com Instruments, and they had more money and more freedom than several of their neighbors who were tied down with two or more children. They both liked entertaining, Edith in their house especially, and Charles on their boat, a thirty-foot motor launch which slept four. They plied the local river and inland canals on most week-ends when the weather was good. Edith could cook almost as well afloat as on shore, and Charles obliged with drinks, fishing equipment, and the record player. He would also dance a hornpipe on request.

During the week-end that followed—not a boating week-end because Charles had extra work—Edith glanced several times at the empty birdhouse, reassured now because she *knew* there was nothing in it. When the sunlight shone on it she saw nothing but a paler brown in the round hole, the back

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of the birdhouse; and when in shadow the hole looked black.

On Monday afternoon, as she was changing the bedsheets in time for the laundryman who came at three, she saw something slip from under a blanket that she picked up from the floor. Something ran across the floor and out the door—something brown and larger than a squirrel. Edith gasped and dropped the blanket. She tiptoed to the bedroom door, looked into the hall and on the stairs, the first five steps of which she could see.

What kind of animal made no noise at all, even on bare wooden stairs? Or had she really seen anything? But she was sure she had. She'd even had a glimpse of the small black eyes. It was the same animal she had seen looking out of the birdhouse.

The only thing to do was to find it, she told herself. She thought at once of the hammer as a weapon in case of need, but the hammer was downstairs. She took a heavy book instead and went cautiously down the stairs, alert and looking everywhere as her vision widened at the foot of the stairs.

There was nothing in sight in the living room. But it could be under the sofa or the armchair. She went into the kitchen and got the hammer from a drawer. Then she returned to the living room and shoved the armchair quickly some three feet. Nothing. She found she was afraid to bend down to look under the sofa, whose cover came almost to the floor, but she pushed it a few inches and listened. Nothing.

It *might* have been a trick of her eyes, she supposed. Something like a spot floating before the eyes, after bending over the bed. She decided not to say anything to Charles about it. Yet in a way, what she had seen in the bedroom had been more definite than what she had seen in the birdhouse.

A baby yuma, she thought an hour later as she was sprinkling flour on a joint in the kitchen. A yuma. Now, where had that come from? Did such an animal exist? Had she seen a photograph of one in a magazine, or read the word somewhere?

Edith made herself finish all she intended to do in the kitchen, then went to the big dictionary and looked up the word yuma. It was not in the dictionary. A trick of her mind, she thought. Just as the animal was probably a trick of her eyes. But it was strange how they went together, as if the name were absolutely correct for the animal.

Two days later, as she and Charles were carrying their coffee cups into the kitchen, Edith saw it dart from under the refrigerator—or from behind the refrigerator—diagonally across the kitchen threshold and into the dining room. She almost dropped her cup and saucer, but caught them, and they chattered in her hands.

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"What's the matter?" Charles asked.

"I saw it again!" Edith said. "The animal."

"What?"

"I didn't tell you," she began with a suddenly dry throat, as if she were making a painful confession. "I think I saw that thing—the thing that was in the birdhouse—upstairs in the bedroom on Monday. And I think I saw it again. Just now."

"Edith, my darling, there wasn't anything in the birdhouse."

"Not when you looked. But this animal moves quickly. It almost flies."

Charles's face grew more concerned. He looked where she was looking, at the kitchen threshold. "You saw it just now? I'll go look," he said, and walked into the dining room.

He gazed around on the floor, glanced at his wife, then rather casually bent and looked under the table, among the chair legs. "Really, Edith—"

"Look in the living room," Edith said.

Charles did, for perhaps fifteen seconds, then he came back, smiling a little. "Sorry to say this, old girl, but I think you're seeing things. Unless, of course, it was a mouse. We might have mice. I hope not."

"Oh, it's much bigger. And it's brown. Mice are gray."

"Yep," Charles said vaguely. "Well, don't worry, dear, it's not going to attack you. It's running." He added in a voice quite devoid of conviction, "If necessary, we'll get an exterminator."

"Yes," she said at once.

"How big is it?"

She held her hands apart at a distance of about sixteen inches. "This big."

"Sounds like it might be a ferret," he said.

"It's even quicker. And it has black eyes. Just now it stopped just for an instant and looked straight at me. Honestly, Charles." Her voice had begun to shake. She pointed to the spot by the refrigerator. "Just there it stopped for a split second and—"

"Edith, get a grip on yourself." He pressed her arm.

"It looks so evil. I can't tell you."

Charles was silent, looking at her.

"Is there any animal called a yuma?" she asked.

"A yuma? I've never heard of it. Why?"

"Because the name came to me today out of nowhere. I thought—because I'd thought of it and I'd never seen an animal like this that maybe I'd seen it somewhere."

"Y-u-m-a?"

Edith nodded.

Charles, smiling again because it was turning into a funny game, went to the dictionary as Edith had done and looked for the word. He closed the dictionary and went to

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the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the bottom shelves of the bookcase. After a minute's search he said to Edith, "Not in the dictionary and not in the Britannica either. I think it's a word you made up." And he laughed. "Or maybe it's a word in *Alice in Wonderland*."

It's a real word, Edith thought, but she didn't have the courage to say so. Charles would deny it.

Edith felt done in and went to bed around ten with her book. But she was still reading when Charles came in just before eleven. At that moment both of them saw it: it flashed from the foot of the bed across the carpet, in plain view of Edith and Charles, went under the chest of drawers and, Edith thought, out the door. Charles must have thought so, too, as he turned quickly to look into the hall.

"You saw it!" Edith said.

Charles's face was stiff. He turned the light on in the hall, looked, then went down the stairs.

He was gone perhaps three minutes, and Edith heard him pushing furniture about. Then he came back.

"Yes, I saw it." His face looked suddenly pale and tired.

But Edith sighed and almost smiled, glad that he finally believed her. "You see what I mean now. I wasn't seeing things."

"No," Charles agreed.

Edith was sitting up in bed. "The awful thing is, it looks uncatchable."

Charles began to unbutton his shirt. "Uncatchable. What a word. Nothing's uncatchable. Maybe it's a ferret. Or a squirrel."

"Couldn't you tell? It went right by you."

"Well!" He laughed. "It *was* pretty fast. You've seen it two or three times and you can't tell what it is."

"Did it have a tail? I can't tell if it had or if that's the whole body —that length."

Charles kept silent. He reached for his dressing gown, slowly put it on. "I think it's smaller than it looks. It is fast, so it seems elongated. Might be a squirrel."

"The eyes are in the front of its head. Squirrels' eyes are sort of at the side."

Charles stooped at the foot of the bed and looked under it. He ran his hand over the tucked foot of the bed, underneath. Then he stood up. "Look, if we see it again—*if* we saw it—"

"What do you mean *if*? You did see it—you said so."

"I *think* so." Charles laughed. "How do I know my eyes or my mind isn't playing a trick on me? Your description was so eloquent." He sounded almost angry with her.

"Well—*if*?"

"If we see it again, we'll borrow a cat. A cat'll find it."

"Not the Masons' cat. I'd hate to ask them."

They had had to throw pebbles at the Masons' cat to keep it away

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when the bluetits were starting to fly. The Masons hadn't liked that. They were still on good terms with the Masons, but neither Edith nor Charles would have dreamed of asking to borrow Jonathan.

"We could call in an exterminator," Edith said.

"Ha! And what'll we ask him to look for?"

"What we saw," Edith said, annoyed because it was Charles who had suggested an exterminator just a couple of hours before. She was interested in the conversation, vitally interested, yet it depressed her. She felt it was vague and hopeless, and she wanted to lose herself in sleep.

"Let's try a cat," Charles said. "You know, Farrow has a cat. He got it from the people next door to him. You know, Farrow the accountant who lives on Shanley Road? He took the cat over when the people next door moved. But his wife doesn't like cats, he says. This one—"

"I'm not mad about cats either," Edith said. "We don't want to acquire a cat."

"No. All right. But I'm sure we could borrow this one, and the reason I thought of it is that Farrow says the cat's a marvelous hunter. It's a female nine years old, he says."

Charles came home with the cat the next evening, thirty minutes later than usual, because he had gone home with Farrow to fetch it. He and Edith closed the doors and the windows, then let the cat out of its basket in the living room. The cat was white with gray brindle markings and a black tail. She stood stiffly, looking all around her with a glum and somewhat disapproving air.

"Ther-re, Puss-Puss," Charles said, stooping but not touching her. "You're only going to be here a day or two. Have we got some milk, Edith? Or better yet, cream."

They made a bed for the cat out of a carton, put an old towel in it, then placed it in a corner of the living room, but the cat preferred the end of the sofa. She had explored the house perfunctorily and had shown no interest in the cupboards or closets, though Edith and Charles had hoped she would. Edith said she thought the cat was too old to be of much use in catching anything.

The next morning Mrs. Farrow rang up Edith and told her that they could keep Puss-Puss if they wanted to. "She's a clean cat and very healthy. I just don't happen to like cats. So if you take to her—or she takes to you—"

Edith wriggled out by an unusually fluent burst of thanks and explanations of why they had borrowed the cat, and she promised to ring Mrs. Farrow in a couple of days. Edith said she thought they had mice, but were not sure enough to call in an exterminator. This verbal effort exhausted her.

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The cat spent most of her time sleeping either at the end of the sofa or on the foot of the bed upstairs, which Edith didn't care for but endured rather than alienate the cat. She even spoke affectionately to the cat and carried her to the open doors of closets, but Puss-Puss always stiffened slightly, not with fear but with boredom, and immediately turned away. Meanwhile she ate well of tuna, which the Farrows had prescribed.

Edith was polishing silver at the kitchen table on Friday afternoon when she saw the thing run straight beside her on the floor—from behind her, out the kitchen door into the dining room like a brown rocket. And she saw it turn to the right into the living room where the cat lay asleep.

Edith stood up at once and went to the living-room door. No sign of it now, and the cat's head still rested on her paws. The cat's eyes were closed. Edith's heart was beating fast. Her fear mingled with impatience and for an instant she experienced a sense of chaos and terrible disorder. The animal was in the room! And the cat was of no use at all! And the Wilsons were coming to dinner at seven o'clock. And she'd hardly have time to speak to Charles about it because he'd be washing and changing, and she couldn't, wouldn't mention it in front of the Wilsons, though they knew the Wilsons quite well. As Edith's chaos became fustration, tears burned her eyes. She imagined herself jumpy and awkward all evening, dropping things, and unable to say what was wrong.

"The yuma. The damned yuma!" she said softly and bitterly, then went back to the silver and doggedly finished polishing it and set the table.

The dinner, however, went quite well, and nothing was dropped or burned. Christopher Wilson and his wife Frances lived on the other side of the village, and had two boys, seven and five. Christopher was a lawyer for Pan-Com.

"You're looking a little peaked, Charles," Christopher said. "How about you and Edith joining us on Sunday?" He glanced at his wife. "We're going for a swim at Hadden and then for a picnic. Just us and the kids. Lots of fresh air."

"Oh—" Charles waited for Edith to decline, but she was silent. "Thanks very much. As for me—well, we'd thought of taking the boat somewhere. But we've borrowed a cat, and I don't think we should leave her alone all day."

"A cat?" asked Frances Wilson. "Borrowed it?"

"Yes. We thought we might have mice and wanted to find out," Edith put in with a smile.

Frances asked a question or two about the cat and then the subject was dropped. Puss-Puss at that moment was upstairs, Edith thought. She always went upstairs when a new person came into the house.

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Later when the Wilsons had left, Edith told Charles about seeing the animal again in the kitchen, and about the unconcern of Puss-Puss.

"That's the trouble. It doesn't make any noise," Charles said. Then he frowned. "Are you *sure* you saw it?"

"Just as sure as I am that I ever saw it," Edith said.

"Let's give the cat a couple of more days," Charles said.

The next morning, Saturday, Edith came downstairs around nine to start breakfast and stopped short at what she saw on the living-room floor. It was the yuma, dead, mangled at head and tail and abdomen. In fact, the tail was chewed off except for a damp stub about two inches long. And as for the head, there was none. But the fur was brown, almost black where it was damp with blood.

Edith turned and ran up the stairs.

"Charles!"

He was awake, but sleepy. "What?"

"The cat caught it. It's in the living room. Come down, will you? —I can't face it, I really can't."

"Certainly, dear," Charles said, throwing off the covers.

He was downstairs a few seconds later. Edith followed him.

"Um. Pretty big," he said.

"What is it?"

"I dunno. I'll get the dustpan." He went into the kitchen.

Edith hovered, watching him push it onto the dustpan with a rolled newspaper. He peered at the gore, a chewed windpipe, bones. The feet had little claws.

"What is it? A ferret?" Edith asked.

"I dunno. I really don't." Charles wrapped the thing quickly in a newspaper. "I'll get rid of it in the ashcan. Monday's garbage day, isn't it?"

Edith didn't answer.

Charles went through the kitchen and she heard the lid of the ashcan rattle outside the kitchen door.

"Where's the cat?" she asked when he came in again.

He was washing his hands at the kitchen sink. "I don't know." He got the floor mop and brought it into the living room. He scrubbed the spot where the animal had lain. "Not much blood. I don't see any here, in fact."

While they were having breakfast, the cat came in through the front door, which Edith had opened to air the living room—although she had not noticed any smell. The cat looked at them in a tired way, barely raised her head, and said, "Mi-o-ow," the first sound she had uttered since her arrival.

"Good pussy!" Charles said with enthusiasm. "Good Puss-Puss!"

But the cat ducked from under his congratulatory hand that would have stroked her back and went on slowly into the kitchen for her breakfast of tuna.

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Charles glanced at Edith with a smile which she tried to return. She had barely finished her egg, but could not eat a bite more of her toast.

She took the car and did her shopping in a fog, greeting familiar faces as she always did, yet she felt no contact between herself and other people. When she came home, Charles was lying on the bed, fully dressed, his hands behind his head.

"I wondered where you were," Edith said.

"I felt drowsy. Sorry." He sat up.

"Don't be sorry. If you want a nap, take one."

"I was going to get the cobwebs out of the garage and give it a good sweeping." He got to his feet. "But aren't you glad it's gone, dear—whatever it was?" he asked, forcing a laugh.

"Of course. Yes, God knows." But she still felt depressed, and she sensed that Charlie did, too. She stood hesitantly in the doorway. "I just wonder what it was." If we'd only seen the head, she thought, but couldn't say it. Wouldn't the head turn up, inside or outside the house? The cat couldn't have eaten the skull.

"Something like a ferret," Charles said. "We can give the cat back now, if you like."

But they decided to wait till tomorrow to ring the Farrows.

Now Puss-Puss seemed to smile when Edith looked at her. It was a weary smile, or was the weariness only in the eyes? After all, the cat was nine. Edith glanced at the cat many times as she went about her chores that week-end. The cat had a different air, as if she had done her duty and knew it, but took no particular pride in it.

In a curious way Edith felt that the cat was in alliance with the yuma, or whatever animal it had been—was or had been in alliance. They were both animals and had understood each other, one the enemy and stronger, the other the prey. And the cat had been able to see it, perhaps hear it too, and had been able to get her claws into it. Above all, the cat was not afraid as she was, and even Charles was, Edith felt. At the same time she was thinking this, Edith realized that she disliked the cat. It had a gloomy, secretive look. The cat didn't really like them, either.

Edith had intended to phone the Farrows around three on Sunday afternoon, but Charles went to the telephone himself and told Edith he was going to call them. Edith dreaded hearing even Charles's part of the conversation, but she sat on with the Sunday papers on the sofa, listening.

Charles thanked them profusely and said the cat had caught something like a large squirrel or a ferret. But they really didn't want to keep the cat, nice as she was, and could they bring her over, say around six? "But—well, the job's done, you see, and we're awfully

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grateful . . . I'll definitely ask at the plant if there's anyone who'd like a nice cat."

Charles loosened his collar after he put the telephone down. "Whew! That was tough—I felt like a heel! But after all, there's no use saying we want the cat when we don't. Is there?"

"Certainly not. But we ought to take them a bottle of wine or something, don't you think?"

"Oh, definitely. What a good idea! Have we got any?"

They hadn't any. There was nothing in the way of unopened drink but a bottle of whiskey, which Edith proposed cheerfully.

"They did do us a big favor," Edith said.

Charles smiled. "That they did!" He wrapped the bottle in one of the green tissues in which their liquor store delivered bottles and set out with Puss-Puss in her basket.

Edith had said she did not care to go, but to be sure to give her thanks to the Farrows. Then Edith sat down on the sofa and tried to read the newspapers, but found her thoughts wandering. She looked around the empty, silent room, looked at the foot of the stairs and through the dining-room door.

It was gone now, the yuma baby. Why she thought it was a baby, she didn't know. A baby *what*? But she had always thought of it as young—and at the same time as cruel, and knowing about all the cruelty and evil in the world, the animal world and the human world. And its neck had been severed by a cat. They had not found the head.

She was still sitting on the sofa when Charles came back.

He came into the living room with a slow step and slumped into the armchair. "Well—they didn't exactly want to take her back."

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't their cat, you know. They only took her on out of kindness—or something—when the people next door left. They were going to Australia and couldn't take the cat with them. The cat sort of hangs around the two houses there, but the Farrows feed her. It's sad."

Edith shook her head involuntarily. "I really didn't like the cat. It's too old for a new home, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. Well, at least she isn't going to starve with the Farrows. Can we have a cup of tea, do you think? I'd rather have that than a drink."

And Charles went to bed early, after rubbing his right shoulder with liniment. Edith knew he was afraid of his bursitis or rheumatism starting.

"I'm getting old," Charles said to her. "Anyway, I feel old tonight."

So did Edith. She also felt melancholy. Standing at the bathroom mirror, she thought the little lines under her eyes looked deeper. The day had been a strain, for a Sunday. But the horror was out of the

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house. That was something. She had lived under it for nearly a fortnight.

Now that the yuma was dead, she realized what the trouble had been, or she could now admit it. The yuma had opened up the past, and it had been like a dark and frightening gorge. It had brought back the time when she had lost her child—on purpose—and it had recalled Charles's bitter chagrin then, his pretended indifference later. It had brought back her guilt. And she wondered if the animal had done the same thing to Charles? He hadn't been entirely noble in his early days at Pan-Com. He had told the truth about a man to a superior, the man had been dismissed—Charles had got his job—and the man had later committed suicide. Simpson. Charles had shrugged at the time. But had the yuma reminded him of Simpson? No person, no adult in the world, had a perfectly honorable past, a past without some crime in it...

Less than a week later, Charles was watering the roses one evening when he saw an animal's face in the hole of the birdhouse. It was the same face as the other animal's, or the face Edith had described to him, though he had never had such a good look at it as this.

There were the bright, fixed black eyes, the grim little mouth, the terrible alertness of which Edith had told him. The hose, forgotten in his hands, shot water straight out against the brick wall. He dropped the hose, and turned toward the house to cut the water off, intending to take the birdhouse down at once and see what was in it; but, he thought at the same time, the birdhouse wasn't big enough to hold such an animal as Puss-Puss had caught. That was certain.

Charles was almost at the house, running, when he saw Edith standing in the doorway.

She was looking at the birdhouse. "There it is *again!*"

"Yes." Charles turned off the water. "This time I'll see what it is."

He started for the birdhouse at a trot, but midway he stopped, staring toward the gate.

Through the open iron gate came Puss-Puss, looking bedraggled and exhausted, even apologetic. She had been walking, but now she trotted in an elderly way toward Charles, her head hanging.

"She's back," Charles said.

A fearful gloom settled on Edith. It was all so ordained, so terribly predictable. There would be more and more yumas. When Charles shook the birdhouse in a moment, there wouldn't be anything in it, and then she would see the animal in the house, and Puss-Puss would again catch it. She and Charles, together, were stuck with it.

"She found her way all the way back here, I'm sure. Two miles," Charles said to Edith, smiling.

But Edith clamped her teeth to repress a scream.

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A tender and moving story, most gently told in its own firm and realistic way, about the Chapel of the Little Flowers in the Coup de Foudre and about a statue of St. Francis of Assisi and more particularly about "something like a miracle" . . .

MORE OF A NOTABILITY

by DION HENDERSON

"I BEEN SEARCHING MY MEMORY," the Sheriff said testily, "but I don't recollect asking any game wardens for advice on a pure case of burglary."

"First you called it a kidnaping," I said. "Didn't you ever hear of Saint Francis of Assisi, the fellow who preached to the birds?"

"I've heard you make a few biblical remarks to quail during hunting season, especially when you miss 'em," the Sheriff said, steadying the car. "But anybody steal you, it's still kidnaping."

"Well," I said, hanging on around a bend, "I looked in the book and there ain't no open season at all on saints, so we've got concurrent jurisdiction."

Father Paul's Chapel of the Little Flowers was about six miles from town, and at least half of the six miles were straight up. We left the four lanes of the river road and made the curving climb up into the hills where the evergreen plantations began to grow together over the road, until the road became quite narrow, to where the old log chapel stood back from the road with the Norway pines tall beside it.

In the front yard, where the children might see it even when they passed by on the road, was the shrine that Father Paul had built: the little pool, shallow enough so that even small birds might splash in it without danger and small animals could come to drink, and the stone terraces he had laid out, bright with flowers, and a bench at the center of the curving wall of stone and flowers, and above the bench, with every line directing the eye toward it, the shelter built to display the figure of St. Francis. But the little statue of St. Francis was no longer there.

"At first I found it very hard to believe," Father Paul said. "I thought perhaps it had fallen. Or the wind, or something."

He was a little old man with white hair that had grown kind of shaggy, and mostly he wore a black habit that was getting rusty around the edges, with a pruning shears sticking out of one pocket and another pocket bulging with sunflower seeds. He had taken us back into the room

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that was his study when it wasn't his kitchen or bedroom, and made tea in a white and blue teapot; but telling us about the St. Francis he forgot to pour the tea.

"After sixty years," he said, "it is difficult for me to admit that I have accomplished so little. Not only does one of my people steal, but he steals from me."

"Might be a stranger," the Sheriff said hopefully. "Lots of strangers come up here to see the shrine, late years."

"Thank you," Father Paul smiled at him. "That was very kind of you."

He remembered the tea now, and poured it, lifting the pot and holding it so that the top hardly rattled. His hands were white and blue, like the teapot, and it didn't look as though they were strong enough to have built the chapel, or the stone walls and terraces, even in sixty years.

"I felt very bad when I called you," he said. "But I'm afraid there's nothing you can do."

"Don't look right out there, empty that way," the Sheriff said uneasily.

"I could get another statue. But it would not be the same. My old friend, who came here so many summers for the fishing, sent it to me, and in a way it was responsible for the shrine."

"I can't remember that far back," the Sheriff said.

"At first there was only a small garden and the pool. And then my friend sent me the Saint Francis as a gift, and in time the shrine developed."

He waved one of his hands at the wall where there was a plate rail with cups and different-sized little saucers on it.

"You see, he knew that I have this affection for porcelain and he sent me the Saint Francis, and that made it very special."

"Was it very valuable?"

Father Paul merely waved his hand.

"My friend was very kind and very thoughtful, but he did not know much about porcelain. Nowadays it is quite technical, with talk of how the glost fires at cone five on the pyrometric scale, and the proportions of kaolin, and this concerns even such material as restaurant platters."

"Sure," the Sheriff said uncomfortably.

"But my Saint Francis, if you viewed him from a little distance, and in a certain light—if there was not too much—it was possible to be reminded of one of the della Robbias, the one who did the singing gallery for the Cathedral at Florence that I saw in the Museo del Duomo. Or the tomb of the Bishop of Fiesole."

The Sheriff looked at me over his teacup as if it was my fault or something.

Father Paul said, "Or sometimes I thought it was more like something Giuseppe Gricci might have done, before King Charles carried him off

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to Spain, or even afterward from the Buen Retiro."

The Sheriff drank his tea and cleared his throat.

"I'll do all I can to recover it for you," he said in his best campaign voice. "But I can't promise anything."

Father Paul didn't pay any attention.

"I think I liked it best in the evening," he said softly, "when it seemed like a della Robbia, because then it would have been made such a short time after the great saint walked the fields in life, and it would seem that he had come now to preach to my birds as he did once on the road between Cannaio and Bevagno."

He walked outside with us.

"What I meant to say is that I really liked it very much, and my friend was pleased that I liked it. You understand."

"Yes," the Sheriff said. "I think so."

We left him sitting on the stone bench, fumbling in the pocket that bulged with the sunflower seeds, because as soon as he sat down a couple of chipmunks popped out of the stone wall and sat up expectantly.

We drove some slower and a lot quieter going back to town. When we hit the four-lane river road the Sheriff muttered something about how I didn't have much to offer, and I said that it seemed to me he'd invited me not to offer much, and he said he was a lot more worried about the way Father Paul was feeling about the missing St. Francis and I said I was too, and then he said that sometimes he was sorry he was such a heathen, and I said I was sorry too, and he said about what, and I said about him being such a heathen. So after that we didn't talk at all.

Back in town I left my old friend and fellow law-enforcement officer to sulk in his office in the jail, and walked on across the courthouse square toward the river. It was coming on dark and the kids were roller skating on the sidewalks that radiated out from the courthouse like a spider web, and across the street there was a lot of hammering and sawing and hollering where volunteer carpenters were putting up buildings for the tourist festival. They were building a fort, but like a good many other things around, only the front of it was real.

Just as I turned the corner one of Johnny La Pointe's Norsemen came in low over the buildings, heading for a landing on the flowage, and I decided to go on down to the docks and see the fish they were bringing back from a week up in the Lac des Mille et Une Lacs. On the way I passed the old white frame house that Doc Champion used for an office-and-hospital, and Doc was standing on the porch smoking and letting the breeze that was now rising up from the river cool the sweat on his face. His shirt was wet through, so I figured there must

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have been a bad time somewhere but there was no use talking about it.

"Evening, Doc," I said. "Care to meet me on the east fork of the Warrior tomorrow morning for a little trout fishing?"

"Maybe the next day," Doc said and I could see his teeth white in the dusk. We'd been making that date off and on for ten years and he never got to go fishing at all, so it got to be a joke.

He didn't make it that morning either, but then, neither did I because somebody got excited about deer poaching up on the reservation and I spent most of the next day on a wild deer chase, you might say.

But then when I was driving back into town the next afternoon I passed Father Paul and stopped to talk.

"I was in town to tell the Sheriff," he said. "Everything is settled with Saint Francis."

"You found him?" I was startled.

"No," Father Paul said. "But it is all right. I have decided that perhaps it is better this way."

I didn't say anything but he looked at my face and then looked away.

"It is like this," he said. "I am an old man now, and my friend is dead, and the Saint Francis is gone, and the shrine is a great deal of work. I have decided perhaps it is better if we go back and have just a small garden and a pool again."

"Well now," I started to wave my arms and think of objections but he held up one of the white, blue-veined hands.

"I have been very proud of the shrine," he said carefully, as though he were trying to explain something simple to a backward child, and I felt like a backward child, all right. "I have been proud, and that is vanity, and in a way it is presumptuous; and perhaps having the Saint Francis taken is a way of pointing out to me that I have lapsed into error."

"I'm not convinced."

Father Paul smiled at me.

"Did I ever tell you the story of how Saint Francis himself, in imitation of our Lord, fasted in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, he did this thing. But at the end of the fasting he nibbled on his *second* loaf, so that he would not be presumptuous. Do you understand?"

"No," I said. "Not that it matters, since I'm presumptuous most of the time and would be more so if I could figure out how. But I suppose it's a fine line."

"Yes," Father Paul said. "And if this were the means of correcting my vanity it would be almost a Notability."

"I don't guess I know that word, either."

"It was a word commonly used by the followers of Saint Francis to describe the wondrous things he did to those about him, the things he did generously, like the scattering of lit-

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tle flowers. Hence they say, the Little Flowers of Saint Francis."

"Something like a miracle."

"Very much so, in a small way," Father Paul said. "But there are very stern regulations about miracles."

"So I have heard," I said, "although I'm a little shy of miracles myself. Can I take you home in the car?"

"Only to the place where the high road goes into the hills, thank you. Then I can walk the last few miles in the twilight and hear the vespers of the meadow larks, and perhaps come upon a raccoon, or a fox."

"All right," I said. "The sharptail grouse are using the big fields above Abercrombies, if you like to see them coming in to roost."

"That would be fine," Father Paul said. "Although I would like to see a fox tonight. Did I ever tell you the story of how Saint Francis tamed the fierce wolf of Grubbio?"

"Yes," I said suddenly, "and it just gave me an idea."

I took him up the bluff and then I went back into town. There was a light in the jail office and the Sheriff was still there, sitting morosely with his coffee pot.

"I figured it's time I helped you out a little with the Saint Francis case," I said. "It being a matter of concurrent jurisdiction."

"I don't need any help. Father Paul came in."

"I know, I saw him too. But tell me, why would anyone want to steal a statue of Saint Francis?"

"Beats me," the Sheriff said glumly. "Maybe for a joke. Maybe to bust up and use for chalk, like we did with kewpie dolls when we were kids. Maybe for a carnival booth prize. Lots of reasons," he said. "Maybe even for something religious."

"All right," I said. "You think about why a religious-type fellow might want Saint Francis, while we're walking down to talk to Doc Champion."

"Them deer poachers didn't hit you on the head or anything today?"

"There weren't any deer poachers," I said. "But the sun was pretty hot. Come along anyway."

We caught Doc just as he was leaving.

"What?" he said. "Have I had any unusual patients lately?" Doc is a big fellow with curly hair and a dark face and he showed those white teeth again. "Of course not," he said. "Oh, old man Hornickle came down with mumps on his eightieth birthday."

"The hell he did," the Sheriff exclaimed.

"Never mind," Doc said. "And a man from Chicago came in with fishhooks caught in both ears."

"At the same time?" The Sheriff was fascinated. "How'd he do that?"

"Never mind," Doc said. "And then there was a kid with a sick pointer puppy."

"I got a funny interest in the kid with the dog," I said. "What kid and what was the matter with the dog?"

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"I don't know," Doc said. "I was out on a call and the kid wouldn't wait. But my nurse said the boy told her that Albert Medicine Dancer sent him."

"Now we're getting somewheres," I said. "Next we have to find Albert. I think I saw a tent down at La Pointe's dock."

"Go ahead." The Sheriff sounded kind of resigned. "We might as well."

"I think you're both going crazy," Doc Champion said, "and apparently it's contagious. I'll go along because Albert would never talk to two cops at the same time under any conditions. Even you two."

In the summertime Albert Medicine Dancer came down from the reservation to work in the tourist festival, but the rest of the year he was what I guess you'd call a genuine shaman, because I know Doc had spent a good deal of time with him, especially out in the woods monkeying with plants and herbs. Anyway, his ethics were very rigid and even when he was dancing for tourists he wore legitimate trappings and the only time he did a full-fledged rain dance there was a cloudburst, so after that they wouldn't let him do it again.

He was sitting in front of the tent watching the glow of a Coleman lantern and while he didn't pay any attention to me or the Sheriff he greeted Doc as an equal.

After the greeting, which was very formal, Doc said experimentally, "On the Nation there are many small boys and many dogs."

"This is true," Medicine Dancer said with some distaste. "Especially dogs."

"There is one boy, and one dog, particularly."

Medicine Dancer looked gloomy.

"And a malefaction. It is inescapable, once you have small boys and dogs—and various policemen."

"Not this time," Doc said hastily. "What I am concerned about is that perhaps the dog is sick."

"I am very little concerned with dogs," Medicine Dancer said loftily.

"So am I, ordinarily," Doc said.

"To treat dogs would be contrary to my principles," Medicine Dancer said. "When I was a boy, dogs were for feast days. And even then I did not like dogs."

"But this boy came looking for me and I was not there," Doc said earnestly. "And now I am unable to find him."

"Well," Medicine Dancer said, "that is another matter, I suppose. One must respond when sought."

"Just so."

"It seems to me that I remember something about a small boy and a sick dog. But one forgets rapidly such things as small boys and sick dogs."

The Sheriff stirred restively and I stomped on his foot. You can't rush a thing like this.

Doc said, "There are exceptions."

Albert Medicine Dancer looked at Doc closely.

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"One may admit it privately," he said. *"A l'interieur de notre profession?"*

"Absolutely."

The Sheriff hissed, "What'd he say?"

"Shut up," I explained.

"Yes," Medicine Dancer said. "I was asked to conduct a ceremony at the house of Tom Walker, to guard against the bad effects of a dog which he feared was ill with the coughing sickness."

"That tells me what I need to know," I whispered to the Sheriff.

"The dog did not have the coughing sickness," Albert Medicine Dancer said carelessly. "So I did not conduct the ceremony. I may have mentioned your name, as a professional courtesy."

"Of course," Doc said. "I appreciate it."

"It is well known that I do not treat dogs."

"Nor I," said Doc Champion. "Although there are exceptions."

We went back up the dock and the Sheriff said, "You don't mean to tell me that you know all those Walker kids. There must be twenty or thirty of them."

"No," I said. "But I know every pointer dog in the county and there's only one up on the reservation. That's a pup out of John Rigney's Snowgirl, and the kid chopped wood all winter for John just to earn the dog."

"You mean to tell me," the Sheriff said plaintively, "that Rigney gave a pup to a kid for chopping wood? Why would he do a thing like that?"

"Probably to keep the kid from stealing one," I said practically, "knowing the way dogs and kids get about each other. This way he got some wood chopped and you didn't have to go to work."

"I'm working now, dang it," the Sheriff said. "Where is this place?"

I could find my way there even at night, yet it took quite a while, and several stops, and there were some trips up fire trails that ended nowhere before we found the clearing where Tom Walker's house stood. After that it took quite a while to explain to Tom Walker's wife that we hadn't come to arrest Tom, so he climbed down out of the attic, and then it took quite a while to explain to Tom that we didn't want to arrest the boy either, and then a considerable walking through the woods with Tom swinging a lantern and hollering to call in the kids who had scattered into the brush when we drove up; and eventually to find the right boy and the dog.

The dog was in a shed and the Sheriff held a flashlight on him and Doc shook his head. The dog was a white pointer puppy with black ears and he lay now with only a raspy cough to show that he was alive.

"It is more than a week now," the boy said. "He will not eat, and he only drinks a little, and cries."

The boy was not very far from crying himself.

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Tom Walker shifted his feet nervously outside the shed and Doc said, "It is all right. He does not have tuberculosis, or influenza, or even distemper. He has an obstruction."

The boy said, "What does that mean?"

"It means that he has taken something into him that he cannot get out. It's still inside of him."

"Then you cannot help him either," the boy said. "He will die."

"We will see," Doc said. "We will take him into town and I will take a picture of his insides and then we will see."

In the car the boy tried to hold the dog on his lap, but he was still quite a small boy and the dog was already quite large and it was what you might call unwieldy; but nobody complained.

"I'm sorry I was out when you came to see me," Doc said. "I wish you had waited."

"The nurse did not want me to stay. The ladies were angry."

"I'll bet," the Sheriff muttered.

"And Medicine Dancer, as is well known, does not treat dogs," I said.

"No," Doc said.

"There was nothing else to do except pray," the boy said. "And I prayed very carefully, but it did not help."

"At the chapel?"

"No," the boy said guiltily. "I did not attend chapel properly last winter, because of chopping so much wood for Mr. Rigney. So I was afraid to go there."

"Just so," Doc said.

We got back to the hospital and Doc carried the dog in and things went pretty fast. He hooked up a bottle to the dog's leg, and took an x-ray of him, and held up the film and grinned at us.

"The professor of anatomy at the university should see me now," he said. "But there it is. If a dog has a pharynx, that is what he has a bone stuck behind."

Then he took a long curved tool and opened the dog's mouth and reached in and moved his hand around gently and pulled it out again, just as gently, and there was the bone, nice and clean and easy.

"A partridge wing," I said sternly to the boy. "You must teach him not to eat the birds, or I will not shoot over his head next fall."

The boy sat motionless, his eyes very wide. Doc took the needle away from the leg and put the dog on the floor and I put a little water in a basin and the dog raised his head and drank thankfully.

"He is going to be all right," the boy said. "It is a miracle."

"No," I said. "More of a Notability."

"I know what that means," the boy said. "Father Paul told us."

"Good," I said very sternly. "Now I am going to tell you something and then you are going to tell me something."

He did not say anything.

"I am going to tell you that the

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Sheriff and I will put you in jail for one thousand years if you do not tell us what you did with the statue of Saint Francis."

The boy looked at the dog and began to cry. Finally he said, "I dug a hole in the woods and buried him."

I waited.

"He did not help," the boy said bitterly. "I was told that he loved the birds and the animals and the little boys and I brought him from the chapel when the dog was sick but he did not help. So I put him in a hole and buried him."

"I don't know very much about religion," I said, "but I know where there is a shovel. If Doc will keep the dog."

"Sure," Doc Champion said. "I will put him in the ward with the mayor's wife."

The next day I met the Sheriff at noon and we drove up to the chapel. Father Paul was out working in the shrine, with the thick gloves he wore to protect his hands. When he saw us he pointed over his head to the shelter behind him.

"Behold," he said happily. "Saint Francis has returned."

"Well, I'll be dogged," the Sheriff said. "How in the world do you explain a thing like that?"

"I shall not try." Father Paul was beaming. "I shall classify it in my mind as a small personal Notability on my behalf, and make a lesson of it for the children."

"Sure it's the same statue?"

"Without a doubt," Father Paul's smile was just a little wry. "There could not be two such wretched pieces of sacred statuary in all the Coup de Foudre. But I am very fond of it."

"And you're not going to take down the shrine?"

"It is very clear to me what I should do now," Father Paul said. "Already I am planning an addition."

"Well," the Sheriff said, "I guess we can say this case is closed."

"Maybe I will use it as the basis for a sermon," Father Paul said. "You don't think it would be presumptuous to call it a Notability?"

"No," I said. "And be sure to let the Sheriff know, so he can come to church."

"Of course." He was very happy. "I will let you both know."

We drove back toward town in kind of murky silence. Finally I said, "Well, he might make a case for Saint Francis at that."

"How so? The boy was pretty mad at Saint Francis."

"If this is too complicated for you," I said, "I'll try to spell it out. If it hadn't been for Saint Francis, and us looking for him, how would the dog have ever got to Doc?"

The Sheriff grunted, and I added slyly, "Not only that, but if a heathen like you ends up in church listening to a sermon on the subject, I'd be willing to vote it a genuine miracle."

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Were they a series of accidents? Or was the big house on the hill a death trap, a house of impending murder? Phyllis was sure of what she saw—but no one believed her. And when Phyllis found herself cornered, desperate, in a hopeless position, with no one to help her—not even her husband Dan . . .

THE SECOND SIGN IN THE MELON PATCH

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE THIRD "ACcident" that Phyllis Prescott realized that her housekeeper, Anna Deiter, was deliberately trying to murder her.

Phyllis had spent the entire morning at the unaccustomed task of scraping paint from a beautiful antique crib which, a few months in the future, would serve as the first bed for Dan's and her prospective son—or daughter. Then, after a quick lunch, she decided to dissolve away the ache of muscles unused to such labor in a bubble bath and follow the bath with a nap which would leave her fresh and relaxed when Dan returned home late that evening.

Languidly outstretched in the tub, Phyllis let the creamy froth of bubbles billow about her. The radio on the shelf above the foot of the tub played soft music, and she closed her eyes, remembering how she and Dan had often danced to the same tune less than a year ago, before their marriage. As she rested her head against the back of the tub, the sound of Anna running the vacuum cleaner downstairs was nothing but a drowsy hum through the nearly closed bathroom door. And as Phyllis' breathing became deeper and more regular, she scarcely heard Anna come up the stairs and enter the bathroom with an armful of freshly laundered towels to be stored in the small closet next to the tub.

Phyllis was never quite sure afterward what made her open her eyes. Perhaps it was the slight sound of something being moved from the shelf over the foot of the tub. But one moment she was nearly asleep, and the next she was frozen in terror at what Anna was doing.

The housekeeper had lifted the radio from the shelf, leaving the plug in the wall socket, and was

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deliberately preparing to drop the radio into the water.

Seemingly oblivious of the apparently sleeping figure in the tub, the housekeeper contemplated the radio for a moment, and a smile played across her lips. Phyllis herself was too frightened to breathe, much less to speak or move. Dan had often lectured her on the risk involved in having a radio so near the tub, and she had always been careful to keep it well back on the shelf when she bathed.

In that last split second as she gazed at the unheeding Anna, Phyllis found herself wondering whether there would be any pain when the radio hit the water and sent the electrical current smashing through her wet body, or whether she would die peacefully and without struggle, like a candle being snuffed out by the wind. And then Anna opened her hand—and the radio dropped.

Involuntarily Phyllis caught her breath as it fell, and Anna turned, startled by the sound. Then, six inches above the bubbly foam, the radio jerked to a stop, suspended in mid-air. The electric cord, never unwrapped from the tight coil put in it when it had left the factory, was not long enough to allow the set to reach the water. It hung in space, spinning at the end of the cord, still playing a slow dance tune. Its weight slowly pulled the loose plug from the wall socket, and the now harmless box of plastic, metal, and glass dropped into the water with a plop.

As if the sound of the radio hitting the water had broken a hypnotic trance, Phyllis leaped from the tub and quickly wrapped a towel around her froth-covered body. "Anna!" she screamed hysterically, pointing to the tub. "You—you tried—"

"You ought to be more careful about having things like that around the tub, Mrs. Prescott," replied Anna in a high whining voice. Phyllis was astonished, not so much by the words as by the look of malice on the housekeeper's wrinkled face. "That's the way these home accidents you read about always happen. When I saw the radio start to fall I tried to catch it, but I was too late. You're lucky you're alive, if you ask me."

Phyllis stared at the housekeeper, shocked into speechlessness by the deliberate lie. The two women locked eyes, and it was Phyllis who first dropped her gaze. "But—but that's not true, Anna," she finally found herself saying. "I saw you *lift* the radio and—and—"

"Lift the radio?" A mocking smile played across Anna's face. "Are you trying to say I dropped that thing into the water?" With a careless shrug of her shoulders Anna turned and opened the bathroom door, preparing to leave. "Tell me, Mrs. Prescott, what on earth would I want to go and do a thing like that for?"

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"But what on earth would Anna want to do a thing like that for?" was Dan Prescott's first question when he arrived home at eight o'clock that evening, and Phyllis left her locked bedroom to sob out the story of what had happened. "You must be mistaken, honey. You said yourself that you were almost asleep in the tub. You just didn't really see what you thought you did."

"Oh, Dan, I did! I did see her," cried Phyllis, her voice trembling.

Dan chuckled indulgently. "Look, I've lived here in Brackton all my life. Sometimes Anna used to take care of me when I was a little boy. Oh, she acts kind of old-maidish sometimes. Most folks say that's because she never married, and maybe they're right. But underneath it all she's the sweetest, kindest person that—"

"I know what I saw, Dan. She tried to kill me."

Dan placed an arm around Phyllis' shoulders and shook his head. "I can't believe that, baby," he crooned. "After all, I've known Anna a lot longer than you have. I'll admit that small-town people take some getting used to for a girl from the city like you—but they're not murderers, honey! Give the people here a chance and try not to suspect them of evil plots just because they seem to act a little odd to you. You'll learn to like Brackton yet."

Never, Phyllis thought to herself. To her, Brackton was one of those dingy, inbred, out-of-the-way places where travelers stopped only long enough to fill up the gas tank, meanwhile wondering why on earth anybody would ever settle there. The village had frightened her from the moment Dan had brought her to live in the big house on the hill overlooking Brackton's small business area. She knew that putting her fright into words would make it sound silly, but to her it was very real. There were the sullen stares of the townspeople every time she walked down the hill into the village to do her shopping. There was the far-away hooting of the milk train sounding like a lost soul at sunset, and the loneliness, the endless waiting for the week-ends when Dan could be home all day—the week-ends that passed all too quickly.

And now, as if to give her fears a solid form, there was Anna.

"Can't we call somebody—the police or something?" she pleaded.

"And what would we say?" replied her husband. "Judd Latham is the only policeman in this village, and he's known Anna longer than you've been alive. Just let a wild tale like this get started and we'd be the laughingstock of the whole village."

"Wild tale? You still don't believe me, do you, Dan?"

"No, frankly, I don't. I think you imagined you saw something. And I think that after a good

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night's sleep you'll realize it was your imagination and nothing else."

"But what about the other times?" moaned Phyllis.

"Other times? What other times?"

"Two months ago—the day we moved into the house. Remember? You'd just hired Anna, and she was taking some things upstairs. I was standing right below the landing when that heavy vase fell. Another couple of inches and—"

"So Anna dropped a vase. You happened to be standing near where it fell. Just an accident, honey."

"And the cleaning fluid, Dan. Remember that? I had it on the front of my dress out in the kitchen, trying to remove a grease spot. And then Anna lit that match—for the burner on the gas stove, she said. If you hadn't come in just then and shouted at her—"

"All right, so Anna isn't the most careful person in the world. That doesn't mean she's trying to kill you." And Dan continued to scoff at her fears until a tiny grain of doubt as to what she had seen began to creep into Phyllis' mind.

"Oh, Dan," she whispered, "it's just that it's so lonely here. You're gone until eight or nine o'clock every night and—"

"But that won't last forever. Within a year the company will have the new factory built right over there on the other side of the state highway. Then it'll only take me five minutes to get home."

"But what about Anna. I can't wait a year for her to—"

"Stop it!" Dan Prescott raised his voice in sudden anger. "Brackton is going to be our home, Phyllis, and I won't start antagonizing the folks in the village because of some fantasy you've come up with. Anna stays—we'll need her to help out after the baby's born. Now let's have supper and see if we can talk about something more sensible."

Supper that evening was a grim affair. Anna served fried chicken, a dish which Dan thoroughly enjoyed and Phyllis loathed. After picking at her mashed potatoes for a few minutes, she pushed back her chair and ran sobbing from the room. Dan heard her run up the stairs and a few moments later the slamming of their bedroom door broke the silence. He rose from his place to go to her, but Anna motioned him to sit down again.

"It's probably the baby coming that makes her so nervous," said the housekeeper. "I recollect that when you were on the way your mother used to imagine things something fierce. Ain't nothing you can do about it but let her get them fancies out of her system."

Up in her room Phyllis lay across the bed and looked despondently out the window at the huge sycamore trees in the front yard, trying to make some sense of the terrify-

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ing confusion of the past few hours. Anna *had* tried to kill her—of that she was certain. But what was to be done? She couldn't leave Dan, even temporarily; there was no place to go. Both her parents were dead, and her only relative, a brother, was in the marines somewhere in Asia. And besides, life alone—without Dan—

Hours later, when Dan came into the room, she pretended to be asleep. After he had got into bed she spent the rest of the night watching through tear-filled eyes the branches of the sycamore trees waving in the moonlight.

The following morning Phyllis got up feeling like a hunted animal in her own house. She tried to make herself believe that what Dan had said was true, but she kept remembering Anna standing over the bathtub with the connected radio in her hand. She considered going to the police and rejected the idea because she could think of nothing to tell Latham that wouldn't sound like insane ramblings. So she contrived to keep as far away from Anna as possible. Her daily purpose became simply to remain alive until Dan came home in the evening, when she could have a few hours of comparative safety.

Two days later Phyllis prepared for her monthly visit to Dr. Courtenay down in the village. As she passed through the living room she saw Anna busily at work polishing a glass bowl filled with brightly colored marbles. The bowl had been in the house when they moved in. Phyllis hated it, but since Anna seemed to consider it a treasure, Dan refused to throw it out.

"Walking out today, Mrs. Prescott?" asked Anna in her singsong voice. "Better be careful. We wouldn't want anything to happen to the baby."

Phyllis wanted to reply that she felt much safer outside the house than in it, but she remembered her husband's burst of anger and said nothing.

"Ain't seen much of you since the other day," Anna continued. "You've been in your room most of the time since then. You oughtta get more exercise."

"I'll be at Dr. Courtenay's office if you need me, Anna," replied Phyllis, going quickly toward the front door.

"Want me to come with you?"

Phyllis left without answering. As she walked to the top of the steps leading down to the sidewalk, she quivered with the relief of being away from Anna for at least a short time. Carefully she negotiated the twenty-four cement steps and then looked back at the house which now towered above her on the steep hill. She imagined she saw a curtain move slightly in one of the upstairs windows and wondered if Anna was behind it.

Dr. Courtenay's office, at the rear of his rambling, two-story house, was a far cry from the gleaming

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steel-and-plastic examining rooms that Phyllis was used to back in the city. The walls, made of thin strips of some dark brown wood, looked a hundred years old. They were hung with cracked, fading photographs of groups of soldiers, pistols, swords, and other Civil War memorabilia, all thick with dust. The examining table and instruments seemed to Phyllis to have come from the same era. Heavy bottles and flasks of liquid and powdered medicines sat on shelves over the ponderous roll-top desk.

Seated at the desk, Dr. Courtenay fitted the old-fashioned décor of his office. A heavy man who still wore high collars and pince-nez eyeglasses and was never seen without an evil-looking cigar protruding from beneath a slate-gray mustache, he considered himself one of the last of the horse-and-buggy doctors in spite of the fact that he had succumbed to the conveniences of the automobile age some forty years earlier.

"You seem to be in fine shape," rumbled Dr. Courtenay to Phyllis as he scratched his thick neck after completing her examination and succeeded in shoving the knot of his tie to a position underneath his right ear. "What are you hoping for—a boy or a girl?"

Phyllis gave the doctor a quick nervous smile and got ready to leave the office.

"I hope it's a boy," continued Courtenay. "This is good country to raise a boy. Lots of room to run around in, plenty of hunting and fishing. That's the way a boy ought to grow up, not trying to make a playground out of a city street. The city's too dangerous for raising a child."

As Courtenay finished his last remark, Phyllis slowly sat down in the chair next to his desk. "Dr. Courtenay," she said hesitantly, "how well do you know Anna Deiter?"

"Anna?" Courtenay strained a cloud of smoke through his drooping mustache. "Known her most of my life, I have. A good woman. Comes from a fine family. She's working up at your place, isn't she?"

Phyllis nodded. She wondered if anyone in Brackton held anything but the highest opinion of her would-be murderer. "I was just wondering if you could tell me anything about her," she said. "I'm new here in town, and Anna—well, she isn't the easiest person to get to know."

"Oh, Anna's not much for idle chatter. She's a lot like her father in that respect. But when the chips were down, Harley Deiter was the one who came through and saved the entire village of Brackton."

"The whole village?" asked Phyllis in surprise. "How did he do that?"

Dr. Courtenay leaned his bulk back in the swivel chair and stared off into space. "When this town

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was built up," he began, "the whole economy of the place was based on the old woolen mill down by the river. Oh, you won't find the building there now—it burned down near ten years ago. But in its time over half the men in the village worked there.

"Then came the depression, and the mill went out of business. People who used to be considered pretty well off were wandering around the streets and wondering how they'd meet their mortgage payments and other loans at the bank.

"Harley Deiter was the president of the Brackton Bank at the time—it was a branch of one of those big-city banks. One day, a year or so after the mill closed, he got a telegram from the bank's board of directors instructing him to call in all his loans and foreclose all mortgages. The telegram was marked Personal, but there's no way to keep a secret in a place this small. Anyway, Harley wouldn't do it. He just kept giving extensions of time and even granting more loans until those city men sent some detectives down and dragged him out of his office by main force.

"Well, they took away just about everything Harley and his family owned. It's a wonder he was able to hang onto the house until he died. That's the one you're living in now—I guess you know that."

Phillis didn't. "You mean Anna's father used to own—"

"Yep. Anna was born and brought up in that house. Hope I didn't let the cat out of the bag by telling you. Maybe she didn't want you to know. Anyway, those city men tried to get Harley on a criminal charge, but the trial was held before a Brackton jury, and somehow those men couldn't see that Harley had done anything wrong. They figured he'd given them an extra year or two that they wouldn't have had otherwise, and during that time most of them had been able to find work and hold onto their homes and self-respect. So you see, the name of Deiter is highly thought of around here."

Phyllis groaned inwardly. If Lucrezia Borgia herself came to Brackton and gave her name as Deiter, she would be welcomed as a local heroine. How could Phyllis convince anyone in Brackton that Anna was capable of murder?

"Anna never married, did she?" asked Phyllis, trying desperately to keep the conversation going and delay the time when she would have to return home.

"Nope. Funny thing about that. She had a fellow once. His name was Luther Copin—no, Cogin, that was it. Cogin was a big 'un—almost the spittin' image of your husband, Mrs. Prescott, but he wasn't of much account, and the whole town hated to see Anna throw herself away on something like him, especially after all Harley had done for us. We didn't know what to do about it—but Harley did.

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"One evening just as the sun was setting, Luther Cogin was seen climbing that long flight of steps up to the house. Most people thought he was going to ask for Harley's blessing on his and Anna's marriage, but there was no way of telling."

"Why not?" asked Phyllis.

"People saw him go up the steps and into the house. They heard him arguing with Harley in a loud voice for near an hour—sound carries on a still summer night. Then the shouting stopped suddenly and there was a long silence. But the funny thing is, nobody ever saw Luther Cogin come back down those steps. What's more, he was never seen again in the village of Brackton or anywhere else, as far as I know. Anna herself was heard crying until sunrise, but Cogin just disappeared. But seeing he had no family, there wasn't anyone too interested in where he'd gone.

"It was only about three weeks after that when Harley Deiter died. Harley fell down those same steps in front of the house. The State Police tried to make out like they thought Anna had something to do with it, but the local folks weren't having any of that nonsense. I examined the body myself, and I told those policemen I couldn't figure out any way a little thing like her could make a big man like Harley trip and fall."

Dr. Courtenay rambled on for several more minutes, relating anecdotes of the early history of Brackton and mentioning names that meant nothing to Phyllis. But always he came back to his main theme: without the Deiters there would be no Brackton today, and therefore within the village Anna could do no wrong.

But when Phyllis finally left the office and walked along the uneven sidewalk toward the house on the hill, her mind was filled with snatches of Courtenay's story of the Deiters. *Cogin was a big 'un—almost the spittin' image of your husband . . . then the shouting stopped suddenly and there was a long silence . . . nobody ever saw Luther Cogin come back down those steps . . . Harley fell down those same steps . . . the State Police tried to make out like they thought Anna had something to do with it . . .*

Had Anna somehow murdered her father after Harley Deiter had disposed of Luther Cogin in some unknown way? And if so, what was she capable of doing to the person who was mistress of the house that had once been hers? What would be Anna's reaction to a woman whose husband so closely resembled the departed Luther Cogin?

With these thoughts racing through her mind Phyllis slowly climbed the long flight of steps in front of the house. And then suddenly one of the steps near the top seemed to slide from under her

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foot. She jerked her body sideways, trying to maintain her balance, and her other foot began to slip as if the step were covered with grease. Waving her outstretched arms in wide circles, Phyllis could feel herself falling backward, and she looked in panic over her shoulder at the sidewalk far below.

And then, once again, her right foot came into sure contact with the surface of the step. She was able to push herself to one side and fall in a heap on the hard cement, pale and shaken at what had almost happened. As the shock and fright diminished, she became aware of something hard and round under the palm of one hand. She slowly lifted the hand and looked at the object.

A glass marble—a marble like the ones in the bowl that Anna had been polishing earlier that morning. Phyllis found several others. Some were on the step where she had fallen, and others had rolled onto steps farther down. But how could they have got out here?

"You ought to watch your step, Mrs. Prescott." Phyllis looked up. Anna was standing on the porch of the house, her face twisted into the same malevolent expression she had seen when the housekeeper had been accused of dropping the radio into the bathtub.

And now Phyllis knew how Harley Deiter had died.

"Did you really hate him that much?" she asked, standing up and brushing herself with her hands.

"Hate who, Mrs. Prescott?" asked Anna in a purr.

"Your father—for what he did to Luther Cogin," replied Phyllis.

"That Dr. Courtenay's got a big mouth," snapped Anna, turning to enter the house. "Some day he'll get it shut—for good."

That evening Phyllis found the rat powder.

She had been searching in a small closet off the kitchen for something to take an ink stain out of a woolen sweater. One shelf of the closet contained detergents, brushes, sponges, and other cleaning aids which Anna used around the house. Now she poked among the bottles and other paraphernalia until she came to the small green box which was pushed almost out of sight in one back corner of the shelf.

She looked at the unopened box curiously. The label read *Bingham's Rat Powder,* and below the name was a picture of a snarling cornered rat. The listing of ingredients indicated that, in addition to several inert materials, the box contained a large percentage of arsenic.

The rat powder hadn't been in the closet when they moved in—Phyllis was sure of that. Furthermore, there were no rats in the big house. And yet the directions on the green box said that the contents were for use only on rats. Involuntarily Phyllis' hand touched her

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throat. In addition to Anna's other duties, the housekeeper was responsible for preparing the evening meals.

As she fought to keep control, Phyllis felt a kinship with the cornered rat on the green box. Who knew when—in what dish—the poison would one day be served to her?

Thrusting the box back into its corner and shutting the closet, Phyllis ran to her bedroom and locked the door. Again she thought of the picture of the rat. What did a rat do when it was trapped in a corner from which there was no escape?

It fought back.

But how? How could she tell Dan or anyone else in Brackton that Anna Deiter, the daughter of the man who had saved the whole town, had undoubtedly killed once and was preparing to kill again? No, that wasn't really the problem. The problem was to get rid of Anna in such a way that nobody would know Phyllis had anything to do with it. And whatever that plan was, it had to be carried out quickly—before Anna decided to put the box of rat powder to its intended use.

Kill Anna? Phyllis' entire being rebelled at the idea. That would make her no better than the housekeeper. From a more practical standpoint, the curriculum of the expensive finishing school she had attended had not provided Phyllis with any instruction in the proper way to commit a murder.

Dismiss her from the house? Equally bad. Anna would only carry her case to the court of public opinion of Brackton, Dan would have to be told, and then—no, that too was out of the question.

The police? What could she tell Latham or the State Police? That there had been a few "accidents" and that her housekeeper kept a box of rat poison on the premises? Could the police do more now than at the time, years ago, when Anna had been suspected of her father's death?

There seemed to be no way out. And yet how could she be expected to stay here and be murdered without even lifting a finger to save herself?

In an agony of frustration Phyllis threw herself across the bed. As she did so, a sweep of her hand sent a magazine she had been reading off the night table and onto the floor. Phyllis looked at the page to which the magazine had opened—a page titled "Laugh and the World Laughs With You"—and in spite of herself she began to giggle hysterically. Then a word in one of the jokes caught her eye. She read the joke . . .

The following morning, giving a trip to the grocery store as her excuse, Phyllis again walked into the village of Brackton. But she didn't go to the grocery. Instead she head-

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ed for Fedder's Hardware Store. She made her purchase and went straight home, stopping for a moment at the trash barrel near the side door before carrying the small paper bag up to her bedroom.

When it was time for lunch, Phyllis prepared two sandwiches of spiced ham. She put them on plates of her best china and spread lettuce neatly around the edges. Then she called Anna.

When the housekeeper appeared at the kitchen door, Phyllis held out one of the plates invitingly. "Call it a peace offering, Anna," she said with a smile. "I know I've been acting a bit strange lately, and I hope you'll forgive me. I must have said some unforgivable things to you." The housekeeper eyed her suspiciously.

"Please take it," Phyllis continued. "It will save you the trouble of making lunch today. And perhaps I can prepare dinner, too. You must need a rest after working so hard around here."

Warily Anna sat down and pulled the plate toward her. As she was about to pick up the sandwich Phyllis spoke again. "Oh, Anna," she said, frowning, "I was going to polish that little silver pin—the one in my jewelry box upstairs. I want to wear it when Dan comes home this evening. I wonder if you'd go up and get it for me."

With a sigh of resignation Anna rose from her place and trudged out of the room. Phyllis heard her climb the stairs. In the still house there was the sound of a drawer being opened on the second floor.

A few moments later Phyllis heard the housekeeper scamper quickly back down the stairs. The front door opened and slammed shut.

Anna had left the house.

"Mike Ellington down at the drug store said he saw Anna get on the bus just before one o'clock," said Dan that evening. "She told him she was leaving Brackton and wouldn't be back." He ran his hand over the dark stubble of beard on his chin. "I wonder why she left so suddenly. You didn't say anything to her, did you, Phyllis—something she might have gotten angry at?"

"No," said his wife, trying to maintain an expression of concern. "As a matter of fact, just before she left, I made lunch for her. But she didn't have time to eat it, so I ate her sandwich as well as my own. But don't worry about it, Dan. I'm sure we can find someone else to help in the house.

"Oh, by the way," she went on, "there was a joke in this magazine I thought was really quite funny. Read it and tell me what you think of it." She handed the open copy of the magazine to her husband.

"A farmer who had several melons stolen from his melon patch," Dan began to read, "placed poison in one of them. Then he put up a

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sign saying, 'One of these melons is poisoned,' believing that the thief, not knowing which melon it was, would leave all the melons alone. The following morning the farmer's sign was gone. In its place was another sign which the thief had put there. The second sign read: '*Two* of these melons are poisoned.'"

Dan lowered the magazine and shook his head in mock despair at his wife. "That's not very funny, Phyll," he said. Phyllis just grinned back at him.

She was not thinking of the joke. She was imagining Anna's reaction earlier in the day when the housekeeper had opened the drawer of her bureau—and had seen standing beside the jewelry case the second box of *Bingham's Rat Powder* with a hole in its side and half its contents gone.

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There are "locked rooms" and "locked rooms," but we now give you an unexpected variation and parlay—a "locked room" and a betting swindle. (What will they be thinking of next?) . . . To Godfrey "Odds" Bodkins, the London bookie (or more euphemistically, London turf accountant) it was no theoretical problem: the leak in his locked room had cost him £5000, and if he didn't plug that leak he'd be wiped out . . .

ODDS BODKINS AND THE LOCKED ROOM CAPER

by RICHARD CURTIS

IF YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING MY humble little anecdotes with any regularity you'll be familiar with the name of Tim Tubb. Tim, like me, is a licensed bookmaker, or "turf accountant" as we like to style ourselves, and his shop is three streets down from mine in central London. Our friendship was born and sealed in a card game in the 1930's, when we were both struggling young sharps who had not yet found our natural element in racing turf. We played thirty hours to a draw, I being too intent on palming cards to notice that he'd marked them. We found each other out simultaneously, took each other's measure for fisticuffs, and decided instead to go on a laughing drunk. Since then our friendship has been firmly founded on the unalterable principle that whomever else we cheat we will not cheat each other, and I, Godfrey "Odds" Bodkins, can proudly state that I have kept my part of the bargain—with a mere handful of exceptions.

Tim and I worked as partners for several years afterwards, but even when we broke off to do solos as bookmakers, we kept in close touch, often tipping each other off with inside dope or offering one another a piece of large, lucrative wagers. We shared many exciting experiences, I can assure you. One of these I have come to call my "locked room caper"; but stimulating as it was, it proved to be ruinous and in fact was directly responsible for setting me on the onerous path to respectability.

It happened in 1960, just before Parliament passed the Betting and Gaming Act legalizing offtrack betting. For five years previous to that I had been operating a highly

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profitable betting parlor off Curzon Street, catering, with the exception of a few old cronies and some other small bettors, to a rather distinguished clientele. Much of the action—and ractrack betting was the only kind of gambling transacted there—was carried on over the telephone, but for those who wished to drop by I had sumptuously appointed the interior in the finest style that Mayfair had to offer: brocades, velvets, crystals, polished woods, and wrought silver. Even the chalk-board was bordered in ormolu. The vulgar function of the parlor, in short, had been disguised for the benefit of tender upper-class sensibilities.

Yet for all its elegance it was still a gambling den, and for all their splendor its habitués were still gamesters, so I took the same precautions with them that I had taken when my quarters were in Soho and my clients were half-crown punters with police records. The most important measures one can take are those aimed at the crooked practice known as past-posting. You see, though races are supposed to begin precisely at post-time, occasionally a race is run several minutes early—to get it in before a light shower turns into a heavy downpour, for instance. The event might begin and end only a few minutes before it's scheduled to, but in those moments a bettor at the track could phone or signal a confederate in a betting room and tell him the name of the horse that had already won the race. The confederate immediately places a bet on that horse with the proprietor, who is not aware that the race is finished, and the proprietor is socked for a big loss.

To prevent against such chicanery, I had soundproofed my Mayfair parlor and installed an elaborate electronic circuit to interfere with messages transmitted to receivers that might be concealed on my clients' persons. I kept the window shades drawn against visual signals from across the street. Visitors were obliged to arrive fifteen minutes before post-time of the first race and to remain until the last race had been run. No one but myself was allowed to make or receive phone calls, nor leave the premises for any reason but what are termed calls of nature—and specially designed bathrooms, as you Americans nicely call them, insured that no information could be smuggled in from outside.

Reckoning that I had all possibilities covered, I was not afraid of being past-posted, and I accepted bets right up to the official post-time. Even if a race did go off ahead of time, the earliest anyone in my room could know about it was when my colleague at the track phoned me the results. On the other hand, I had a rule that no bet phoned in would be honored if it turned out to have been made after the race had started.

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A few of my guests objected that I was treating them like criminals, but as they were just that they didn't complain too vociferously. By way of compensation, the amenities of my establishment were incomparable and the wines unmatched, so all in all the customers were less hampered by rules than they were in many of the best clubs.

In spite of all my security measures, however, a series of winning bets placed by one of my regulars, Sir Kevin Palfrey, led me to suspect that he was victimizing me with some sort of past-post technique. How he was getting track information baffled me completely, and yet, isolated in the room and subjected to my closest scrutiny he somehow managed to outwit me. By the time he'd fleeced me for £5000, I was growing rather frantic for an answer, and so I called in my friend Tim Tubb, who could detect any swindle, having practiced most of them himself at one time or another.

Tim sat with me during the following week, posing as my assistant while keeping Sir Kevin under close surveillance. From time to time I would glance at the two of them, finding much humor in the contrast. Tim was short, balding, and red-faced, shaped approximately like a barrel of stout. Sir Kevin, on the other hand, was tall and straight, possessed of a handsome, rectangular face, lined with worldly experience. He didn't look capable of treachery, but then very few rogues do. That Sir Kevin was a gentleman born and bred was no guarantee of angelic behavior. Many post-war aristocrats were desperate for money and would do anything short of honest labor to get their hands on it.

For the first three days of that week Sir Kevin did nothing extraordinary, placing modest bets on this or that horse, winning some and losing some. Leaving the spy detail to Tim, I performed my usual chores, taking telephone bets, checking with my associates at the tracks, bookkeeping, and the like. It was on the fourth day that events materialized. Two races had been run at Ascot and the third was about to begin. I had just taken a bet on the phone and was writing it down when Sir Kevin jumped to his feet, hastened to my desk, and rapped sharply on it. "I want to bet two thousand pounds on Blue Flame, Number Six, in the next race at Ascot," he announced.

I looked at my watch. It was one minute to post-time; I was obliged to accept his bet. The odds were 3-to-2, meaning I stood to lose 3000 quid. I turned my eyes on Tim. He was nodding vigorously, as if struck with a revelation. He had seen something.

I wondered whether I should refuse the bet, but Tim put his hand up like a traffic policeman's, touting me from doing anything precipitate. He was right. It would

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be most imprudent to make a scene in front of my other clients, especially as I didn't know what Tim had observed or whether we could prove it. £3000 was a lot of loot, but it did not compare with the custom I stood to lose if my pedigreed customers took umbrage at my denouncing one of them. Even if I was right, it would be in bad taste; and if I was wrong it would be catastrophic.

So I swallowed the pill, accepted the bet, and waited for the results. You need expect no surprises. Blue Flame, Number Six, won the race, and Sir Kevin took me for 3000 of the best. My colleague at Ascot told me the race had gone off three minutes early. I was now convinced that somehow Sir Kevin was defrauding me.

As soon as the day ended and the customers had gone, I pushed Tim into a leather armchair. "You saw it? You picked it up?"

He patted his rosy brow with a handkerchief. "Oh, yes, I saw it, Odds. No doubt about it, he's receiving signals. You're being past-posted."

"But by whom, and how?"

"He has two confederates working with him," Tim explained, smiling like a little gnome. "I can only describe one of them, though. He's a foolish-looking bloke with a brown tweed sports jacket, a gray shirt, and a plaid tie."

I frowned, trying to recall who fit that description. Then I gasped. "Why, that's me!" I put my fist menacingly near his nose. "Are you pulling my leg? I'm in no mood for—"

"It's no joke, Odds. The tipoffs are coming from *you*. Look here, what were you doing just before Sir Kevin jumped up and made his bet?"

I pursed my lips and groped for a recollection. I finally found it.

"Why, I was writing down a bet. What does that have to do with it?"

"What was the bet? Who made it?"

"Let's see—it was client Number Thirty-one. That would be Paddy McVeigh. I believe he took Mother's Son in the eighth at Ascot. Yes, he took Mother's Son, the Number Two horse." I have to explain that since horse rooms were illegal then, clients phoning in bets merely identified themselves by number and gave their requests in a kind of shorthand.

"Paddy McVeigh, eh? Didn't he used to work for Sir Kevin?"

"I hadn't thought about it till now, but—of course! He was his butler. Sir Kevin finally had to release him. No one can afford butlers any more. But do you think Sir Kevin would actually collaborate with his ex-butler?"

"Odds, these are trying times. You just don't know *what* peculiar associations the gentry will form when it's down on its uppers. Now tell me, can you recall exactly how

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your conversation with Paddy McVeigh went?"

"Well, he gave his identification number, then said he wanted to put three quid on the nose of Mother's Son in the eighth. He's a small bettor, but sometimes the butlers and valets persuade their masters to bet with me, so I don't like to turn these little chaps away."

"Yes. But tell me *exactly* what he said to you on the phone," Tim insisted.

"Exactly, eh?" I knocked my brow with a knuckle. "To the best of my recollection, he said 'This is Thirty-one. Make it three on two in eight at letter A.' I said that was fine and rang off."

"You're mistaken," Tim declared, gazing at me and waiting for some sign of recognition. "That's not how it happened."

I snapped my fingers. "You're right. He asked me to repeat the information to make sure I'd gotten it straight."

"Just so. And in repeating it aloud you transmitted a code to Sir Kevin, sitting right in front of your desk. I guess it's a simple enough code. Paddy at the track wanted to inform Sir Kevin that Number Six had just won. So he bet three pounds on Number Two. Three times two makes six. The fact that Paddy was betting on the eighth race is irrelevant; only the first two numbers are used to communicate information."

"I see!" I cried, feeling for a moment such admiration for the ploy that I almost forgot I'd been the victim of it. "Well, I've paid eight thousand quid for these lessons, but that's an end of it. They'll never enter *this* place again. In fact, once I've made some calls, no bookie will touch them."

I brooded silently for a moment, and then my indignation came to a boil. "Damn it, that's not enough! I'm going to make them repay me. I'll put it to them that I know just what they've been up to."

Tim knit his brows, then shrugged. "Suit yourself, Odds, but if you ask me, you'll do more harm to yourself than to them. Confront them with their swindle and they'll simply deny it. Why, there isn't even a tactful way you can bar them from your parlor. Whatever action you take, they'll make trouble for you among your other clients. You have no proof, don't you see? And even if you had, you can't very well go to the police with it, can you?"

I went limp. "You're right. But are you suggesting that I not only take my loss but keep on losing? Let them keep coming here and swindling me?"

Tim lapsed into reflection for a moment, then brightened, and a shrewd look came into his eyes. "Not at all, Odds. No, there *is* a way to recover your money from them—by beating them at their own game. Think about it. I want

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to think about it a bit more myself. If you don't discover the answer for yourself, drop by and I'll tell it to you. Or if you have, drop by anyway—perhaps I can help." And he jogged out of my parlor.

As a matter of fact, I did discover the answer for myself. It came to me ten seconds after Tim left. Given two or three factors, it doesn't take me much longer to come up with an angle. I couldn't wait to tell Tim about it at the pub that evening.

A few days later Sir Kevin reappeared in my betting room and placed himself in his usual chair in front of my desk. As soon as he was comfy I made a signal call to Tim, who had been going about his own business—a horse room in Knightsbridge—waiting for me to contact him.

The afternoon passed inconsequentially enough until, just before post-time of the fifth race, Tim called me as prearranged. "Is our mark listening?" he asked with obvious relish. I looked at Sir Kevin, who was eyeing me over the top of his program, and I acknowledged in a monosyllable that our mark was indeed listening to everything I said into the telephone.

"All right then," Tim went on, "let's see if I've got this straight. This is Thirty-one. Make it two on two in seven at letter A."

Tim was of course posing as Paddy McVeigh, and phoning to convey to Sir Kevin that the fifth race, officially due to go off in a minute, had just been run early. Tim's bet on the seventh race at Ascot ("seven at letter A") was actually telling me that the last race had just been won by Number Four ("Two on two"—multiply two times two).

The trick was that the Number Four horse hadn't won at all, but we wanted Sir Kevin to believe it had so that he would bet a tidy bundle on it.

"Would you kindly repeat my message?" Tim asked.

"Gladly," I replied, and in a clear voice I said, "You are Thirty-one, and it's two on two in seven at letter A."

As anticipated, I'd no sooner rung off than Sir Kevin was on his feet, rushing to fall into the trap. But what he said made me gape with dismay. "Give me the Number Five horse in the next race, Odds. I want to put two thousand pounds on his nose."

"The Number Five horse, Sir Kevin?" I stammered, heart thundering. "Are you certain you don't mean—to put your money on another horse? Number Four looks very good indeed. Fanny F, owned by Lord—"

Sir Kevin scowled. "Are you mad, Odds? Please do as I say. The fifth race is about to begin. I want Number Five, Aubrey's Girl, for two thousand."

"Number Five. You certainly have good odds on her," I gulped.

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"Four-to-one. I hope you're not as lucky as you've been lately," I said with a positively loutish grin.

Five minutes later the call came in from my observer at Ascot, and his words went through me like so many rifle slugs: Number Five, Aubrey's Girl, had won the fifth race. I had lost £8000 to Sir Kevin and was wiped out.

The moment the last race was run and my clients had left, I hailed a taxi and headed for Knightsbridge, prepared to thrash Tim senseless. But I was not totally astonished to learn that, on the spur of the moment, he had decided he needed a holiday, and no one knew where to reach him.

A few days later, however, I received a note from him, mailed in London on the day of my debacle. It read:

Dear Odds:

I'm leaving the country for a few days. I'm severely overworked, and besides, I want to give you a bit of time to recover from your shock.

It will come as small consolation to you to hear me apologize for misinterpreting the code, but that's the truth. You'll recall that on the day I sat in at your place, Paddy McVeigh communicated to Sir Kevin, through his phone conversation with you, that Number Six had just won the third race. I figured that Number Six had been arrived at in this way:

Phone message: Paddy bets three pounds on Number two in the eighth race.

Secret message: 3 times 2 is 6. Number Six has just won.

I figured it was the first two digits that constituted the code, but I was wrong. You can get the Number Six by using the last two also!

Phone message: Paddy bets three pounds on Number Two in the eighth race.

Secret message: Deduct 2 from 8, making 6. Number Six has just won.

And so today, when we set out to trap Sir Kevin, I wanted to get him to bet on the Number Four horse in the fifth race, a horse that had already lost. So I said to you on the phone, in effect, that I was betting two pounds on Number Two in the seventh race.

Had the code been based on the first two numbers, as I thought, and not on the last two, Sir Kevin would have multiplied 2 times 2 and gotten 4. Instead, he subtracted 2 from 7 and got 5. And by the most incredible of coincidences, the Number Five horse *had* just won the race. I don't know what to say, Odds, except that I'm profoundly sorry, and hope we can continue to be friends.

Yours,
Tim Tubb

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A few months later I bumped into him at the Queen's Head, but by that time my fury had abated and I was well on my way towards new heights in my legitimate betting shop. So after expressing my disappointment in him in a few pungent words I let him buy me a pint, and tried to regard the incident as finished.

But from time to time I scratch my noggin and wonder if, perhaps, Tim's holiday in Nice might have been paid for by a sizeable share of the money Sir Kevin won from me. Would it not have been easy for Tim to contact him and Paddy and tip them off that I was planning to trap them? And wasn't that coincidence—that Tim's "accidental" choice of Number Five just *happened* to be the winning one—wasn't that coincidence a bit more incredible even than Tim said it was? Maybe Tim *did* make a genuine mistake and the coincidence *was* a real one—but don't you think it rather interesting that, not long after I had forgiven Tim, he hired Paddy McVeigh to scout for him at the track?

But I would reject these suspicions altogether were it not for my consciousness that Tim Tubb would no more think of double-crossing me than I would of him.

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a *NEW* Father Crumlish story by

ALICE SCANLAN REACH

The all-too-human, all-too-compassionate Father Francis Xavier Crumlish of St. Brigid's parish never faced a more "impossible" mystery than the one that involved the foundling boy left in the last pew of the church nineteen years ago; but it took those nineteen years to bring the mystery to its fully developed complexity . . .

In the last four decades most of St. Brigid's parish had sunk into poverty, desolation, and despair. Crime flourished everywhere. "And Father Crumlish, armed only with an unshakeable faith in his God and his fellow men, fought the Devil with every ounce of his physical strength, with the wisdom of his years, and with his unfailing knowledge of his people"—and sometimes with the help of St. Jude, the Patron Saint of the Impossible . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH DEFIES THE IMPOSSIBLE

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

FATHER FRANCIS XAVIER CRUMLISH answered the doorbell of St. Brigid's rectory on this brisk October morning and stood mute and motionless, caught up in a composite of amazement, admiration, and awe as he stared at his visitor. Or, rather, stared at his visitor's multihued sports shirt which blazed beneath a scarred, obviously much-traveled, black leather jacket. Never had the priest seen the likes of it. And Father Crumlish was a connoisseur of colorful shirtings. Indeed, although less than a handful of the souls in his parish or, for that matter, in all Lake City, were aware of it, St. Brigid's pastor usually wore bright-patterned sports attire beneath the dark, somber cloth of his calling. And why not, he reasoned. After all, his Master was the Maker of rainbows.

Now, having recovered sufficiently to utter a few perfunctory remarks, Father Crumlish led the way into the rectory office and sat himself behind his age-worn desk.

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He wrenched his gaze away from the fascinating shirt and focused his dark blue eyes on the face of the slender, red-haired youth seated opposite him. It was a "map of Ireland" face; the pastor, a native of Tralee, County Kerry, easily recognized the road signs. Also, it was a stranger's face. Although it bore several sad characteristics with which Father was all too familiar: hard, taut jaw and bleak, haunted eyes.

After more than forty years in the priesthood Father Crumlish also recognized other signs indicating the inner turmoil which beset his fellowmen. Thus, observing his visitor's callused fingers nervously lighting a cigarette, the old priest sat back and patiently waited for the young man to commence the conversation.

"Father," the visitor finally said in a halting, husky voice. "I—I was hoping you could help me—"

"God willing," Father nodded encouragingly.

"—help me find out who I really am."

Although startled by the unusual request, Father's gaze never faltered. Not a muscle moved beneath the time-trodden paths in his own face. Again he waited.

"You baptized me, Father. Gave me my name." The youth paused and took a deep breath. "Patrick Ireland."

"Glory be to God!" Father Crumlish exclaimed, and now his voice and features evinced pure astonishment. "Young Patrick!" He leaned forward on his desk as memory rushed him back to an almost-forgotten scene some nineteen years ago . . .

He had just concluded his nightly nine-o'clock lockup routine, fastened St. Brigid's weather-weary stained glass windows, bolted the heavy oak doors, and extinguished the lights in the rear of the old church. Then, as was his custom, he sank tiredly into the last pew to have a word or two with Him. It was then that he became aware of a small bundle nudging his side. A small slumbering bundle of a boy with fair rosy skin and a feather-dusting of red-gold hair. Pinned to the bundle's blanket was a hand-written note. Quickly Father scanned the brief message: *The parents of this child are Catholics. Please baptize him.*

Within seconds, pastor and child were at the baptismal font. "Poor nameless waif," the priest remembered murmuring aloud as he gazed down at the tiny features. "But from the look of you, it's sure I am that you're a true son of St. Patrick. A wee shamrock of Ireland."

Father Crumlish experienced again that moment of inspiration and, as if it were yesterday, he recalled the sound of his voice ringing out in the silence of the shuttered church: "Patrick Ireland, I baptize thee in the name of the

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Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Then tenderly he'd carried the baby to the nuns at the orphanage in the parish.

In the ensuing days Patrick Ireland received considerable publicity in Lake City's newspapers. But all appeals for someone to step forward and claim the child were in vain. And as time passed, the boy's years of growing were anything but tranquil. He was the despair of the long-suffering Sisters. Time and again he ran away, was apprehended and returned, until some five years ago when he had finally succeeded in vanishing completely.

. . .

Now, gazing intently at his visitor, the priest discarded the dozen questions on the tip of his tongue in favor of what he considered to be the most important one. "Why are you so set on knowing about yourself, lad?" he asked.

Not looking at the pastor, young Ireland shook his head from side to side in brooding uncertainty. "It's always bugged me, that's all," he finally said. "There's got to be somebody somewhere—*some* kind of family—" His eyes darkened. "I just have to try to find out. See?"

Father saw. He knew that in the heart and mind of every abandoned child lay an unabating ache, a void, a determination to establish his identity.

"I'll do what I can for you," Father said. "But I'm afraid you're asking the impossible." (Actually the priest had made numerous discreet attempts to determine the parentage of Patrick Ireland, but had never been able to turn up a single clue.) Now he regarded the young man speculatively, then seemed to come to a decision. "In the meantime," he said, "have you any plans, Patrick?"

Ireland gazed gloomily into space. "I figured I'd be heading for Vietnam. But the draft board medics say I've got a couple of lung spots." He gave the pastor a wry grimace. "So even the Army doesn't want me."

"Not all are chosen," the priest murmured uncomfortably. "Then what about a job, lad?"

The boy shrugged. "Guess I'll have to scout around."

"Well now! I might have an idea about that. Do you know the Cullen Iron Works on Lake Road?"

"Sure, Father."

"Ned Cullen is famous around here for helping young people like yourself," Father said. It was quite true. Cullen was the third of his line to preside over the family enterprise, its quarters sprawling over a goodly portion of the lakefront industrial complex. Father Crumlish had served with him on many civic committees concerned with the poor and underprivileged, and had called on him frequently to lend a helping hand to one of his needy parishioners. "I'll phone him now, lad."

The pastor picked up the tele-

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phone. A moment later Cullen's secretary, Ellen Flynn, came on the wire. Father Crumlish knew her voice all too well; its strident, whining timber had plagued him for years. Ellen, an angular, pallid-faced woman in her mid-forties, had the exasperating habit of lagging at least half a dozen words behind the rest of St. Brigid's parishioners when they gave their verbal responses during church services. And nowadays, with Mass being said in the vernacular, waiting for Ellen's solitary voice to finish vibrating through the church was almost more than the pastor could bear.

Now, on learning from Ellen that Ned Cullen was attending a Board of Directors meeting, Father Crumlish stated the purpose of his call. "There's a young friend of mine who could do with a job," he said. "Could your boss give him a few minutes today?"

"It would have to be late this afternoon, Father. Say four thirty?"

"He'll be there." Whereupon the pastor supplied his visitor's name, expressed thanks, and hung up the phone.

Ireland got to his feet, murmuring his appreciation, and Father ushered him out of the office. At the rectory door the priest paused.

"Patrick," he asked. "Would you be remembering the legend of St. Jude?"

The youth flushed. "I—I guess I've forgotten about him, Father."

Father sighed. "Being forgotten was St. Jude's cross. Of the Twelve Apostles he was the only one who seemed to have been lost in the shuffle. And all because of his name, poor fellow. He was always confused with Judas."

"I sort of remember—"

"It was an impossible fix that St. Jude was in," the priest continued, "and that's why he's often called the 'Patron Saint of the Impossible.' He has an especially understanding ear for people like yourself with a problem that seems to have no solution."

Father patted Ireland's shoulder. "So why don't you step over to church, lad? Say a prayer to St. Jude and ask him to put in a word for you with the good Lord."

Seated again at his desk some minutes later, Father Crumlish adjusted his bifocals and began to examine St. Brigid's current financial statement. Ruefully eyeing the lengthy column of figures recorded in glaring red ink, he couldn't help but think that it might not be a bad idea if he himself had a bit of conversation with the "Patron Saint of the Impossible."

For twenty-two years Emma Catt had held the position of housekeeper at St. Brigid's. She was a gray, granite woman of Scottish descent who was firmly convinced that one of her duties was to "take charge" of the pastor. Much to Father's annoyance, she

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was constantly reminding him of his advancing years and his aggravating arthritis. His digestive tract was out of kilter, she informed him daily, because he constantly permitted interruptions during his eating and sleeping hours.

Therefore, it was quite understandable that her expression was one of thunderous indignation now as she stood in the doorway of the rectory living room where Father Crumlish had just settled nicely into his worn easy chair to see if the sports pages of the *Lake City Times* carried any news about that giant of ball players, Willie Mays.

"That Tom Madigan is on the phone," Emma announced disapprovingly. "I told him I had a stew on the stove and I was about to dish up your dinner."

"The stew can hold," Father said, getting to his feet and wishing that the stew might hold indefinitely. He knew from long sad experience that Emma's "stew" would be an unholy amalgamation of every leftover scrap of food in the rectory larder. Also, he knew that Lieutenant "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force must have something urgent on his mind deliberately to invite Emma's displeasure by disrupting the dinner hour.

"What is it, Tom?" Father inquired as he picked up the telephone. There was considerable affection in his voice and for a very good reason. Years ago Tommy Madigan had been one of the most troublesome hooligans in St. Brigid's parish. But, thanks to Father Crumlish, he'd won a reprieve from reform school, submitted himself to the priest's stern tutelage, and finally had joined "the force" where he had distinguished himself and justified Father's faith in him.

"I know this is a bad time to call," Madigan said apologetically, "but there's been trouble at the Cullen Iron Works and I didn't want you to hear about it on the newscasts."

"Trouble, Tom?"

"A guard found the body of a man in Ned Cullen's office. He'd been shot—murdered."

"God help us!" Father's grip on the telephone receiver tightened and he braced himself. "Who was the poor fellow?"

"That's why I'm calling you, Father." The policeman hesitated a moment. "According to his draft card and other identification papers, he's the kid you found in the church. Patrick Ireland."

As the room lurched and spun and fingers of steel grasped his heart, the pastor was dimly aware of Madigan's anxious appeals.

"Father! Are you there? Father! Are you all right?"

After what seemed to the priest like a very long time he was again able to speak.

"Tom," he said brokenly, "I my-

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self sent that lad to see Ned Cullen." Dazedly he related his encounter with Patrick Ireland. "So if it weren't for my meddling, the poor boy would still be alive—"

"Now don't blame yourself, Father. You were trying to help him, weren't you?" Again Madigan paused for a moment. "Do you feel up to coming around to headquarters?"

"I do, Tom," the priest replied unhesitantly.

"I'll send a car over."

Some twenty minutes later, the pastor walked into Lieutenant Madigan's office. At the sight of Father's stricken face and unusual pallor the policeman's normally warm brown eyes clouded with concern. But Father was impervious to his friend's anxiety. His attention was on the three other occupants of the room—Ned Cullen; his father, John; and Ellen Flynn's brother, Artie.

Father was surprised to see the elder Cullen. Following a stroke several years ago, the old gentleman had retired, turning over the reins of leadership to his capable, energetic son. And the priest was momentarily puzzled by the presence of Artie Flynn—until he recalled that, like his sister, Artie had been employed for many years at the Cullen Iron Works. He was a guard and watchman, and the priest sometimes wondered how a man in that lowly position could be as free and easy with his spending money as Artie was.

When Father entered the room, Ned Cullen, a handsome, well-built man in his mid-thirties, jumped to his feet and began to speak. But a gesture and a mild but firm word from Big Tom cut him off and he sat down.

"I've told the Cullens about your conversation with Miss Flynn, Father," Madigan said. "We've contacted her—she should be here shortly." He motioned to Ned. "Will you fill Father in?"

"Today was our annual Board meeting, Father," Ned said in a strained voice. "An all-day session; even had lunch brought in. It was after five when we broke up." He halted and glanced at his father who was seated beside him. "Dad is Board chairman, and he was worn out. So we left right away and drove home."

"Then you never got my message, lad?"

Cullen shook his head and the frown on his smooth-skinned face deepened. "Sorry, Father."

Father Crumlish turned and gazed at John Cullen and felt a pang of regret. He remembered when the old man had been a proud and powerful figure, straight and strong as a giant elm. Now Cullen sat hunched in his chair, slowly nodding his head, a shrunken shell of his former self.

"That's what happened, Father," the old man murmured.

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"You said the boy was discovered by a guard, Tom?" Father asked the policeman.

Madigan looked at Flynn. "Tell Father, Artie." Flynn, a heavy-set, red-faced man who sat munching a toothpick, drew himself up importantly.

"I was making my rounds, checking the doors, locks—the usual stuff. When I got to Mr. Cullen's door it was half open." Dramatically Artie removed the toothpick from his mouth and leaned forward in his chair. "I poked my head inside and saw a guy lying on the floor—dead."

"God rest his soul," the priest said in a low voice.

The ensuing momentary silence was broken by a discreet rap on the office door. A police officer entered, handed Madigan a large brown envelope, and departed. Big Tom opened the envelope and drew out a .38 revolver bearing an identification tag.

"This is the murder weapon," he said. He eyed Ned. "The serial number is registered in your name, Mr. Cullen."

Ned stared at the weapon. "Then it's a company gun—for use by the guards." He swung around to Artie. "You were on duty. Why weren't you wearing it?"

Flynn looked unperturbed. "Never do while working the day shift; you don't expect trouble. But Ralph, the night man, always carries it."

"Where do you keep it?" Madigan asked.

"In a steel box mounted on the wall in the guard booth."

"Locked?"

"Well, sure!"

"Anybody else, besides the guards, have a key?"

"Nobody." Artie hesitated and shot a glance at Ned. "Except the boss, of course."

Cullen started to speak but was interrupted by the buzzer on Big Tom's desk. The Lieutenant pushed a key, listened, spoke a word, and then released the key. Saying nothing more, he replaced the gun in the envelope and put it in his desk drawer. A moment later the office door opened and Ellen Flynn walked in. With a sharp exclamation she made a move toward the pastor. But Madigan, as he had with Ned Cullen, brought her to a halt.

"Please sit down, Miss Flynn," he said politely. Ellen obeyed, clasping her black-gloved hands in her lap. "Now if you'll just tell me all you can—from the time Father Crumlish called you."

Ellen drew a white handkerchief from a large handbag and sniffled a bit before replying. "I typed up a message for Mr. Cullen—Mr. Ned—with the information Father gave me, and I put it on his desk. The boy—Ireland—came a little before four thirty. I told him to sit down, that Mr. Cullen would see him when the meeting broke up. Then

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I excused myself and went down the hall."

"Down the hall?" The policeman looked puzzled.

The woman blushed. "I'm through for the day at four thirty, Lieutenant," she said primly, "and I always tidy up before leaving."

"I see. Go on."

"That's all. I got back to my desk, locked it, and went home." She paused and tucked a wisp of salt-and-pepper hair under a squat black hat. "Then somebody from here called and told me—"

"When you got back to your desk," Madigan broke in, "Ireland was still waiting?"

"Why, no." Ellen seemed surprised. "He'd gone into the office with Mr. Cullen."

"What?" Ned exclaimed.

Ellen turned to him, startled. "Well—I assumed that's what happened. Just as I came out of the Ladies Room I saw you go into your office, so naturally I thought—"

"You're mistaken," Ned said sharply. Too sharply? Father wondered.

"But I'm sure I saw you!

John Cullen stirred in his chair. Father Crumlish glanced at him and saw that a purplish tinge had supplanted the paleness of the old man's countenance.

"You're mistaken," John Cullen said, echoing his son's words. "Maybe you saw a man go into Ned's office. But it wasn't Ned."

Madigan raised his eyebrows. "Miss Flynn has worked for you folks a long time," he said, regarding Ned speculatively. "Seems funny she wouldn't recognize her own boss."

Cullen returned his gaze steadily. "My father and I left together when we said we did—right after the meeting."

"And you weren't in your office at all after four thirty?"

"No."

Big Tom examined some notes on his desk before he turned back to Ellen. "Assuming you *were* mistaken—" he began.

"Why would you take their word instead of mine?" she interrupted, her voice rising in anger. "Because they're the almighty Cullens and I'm nobody? Well, Ned Cullen *was* in his office and he had a good reason—"

"Shut up, Sis!" Artie sprang to his feet and clutched her arm.

"No!" The woman's eyes flashed. "It's time everybody knew the truth about the great and noble Ned Cullen!"

"What truth?" Father Crumlish spoke in spite of his resolve not to interfere in the interrogation. "What are you saying, woman?"

Ellen's shoulders shook with intensity as her words tumbled into the room. "The truth they've been hiding for nineteen years to protect their precious reputation—that Patrick Ireland was Ned Cullen's illegitimate son!"

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In the interim of deafening silence the priest turned an unbelieving look on Ned and what he saw confirmed that Ellen Flynn had spoken the truth. Young Cullen sat rigid, his fists clenched, his lips tight, beads of perspiration glistening on his forehead.

"Well, Mr. Cullen," Madigan said; if he was surprised by Ellen's damaging accusation his expression did not betray it. "How about that?"

"Don't say a word, Ned." John Cullen sat bolt upright, his voice ringing out with its old, authoritative fire. "I'll say whatever has to be said." He massaged his thin palms as if to warm himself. "When Ned told me what had happened—about the child—it was I who made the decision. Ned was just seventeen. His whole life—the future I'd planned—were ahead of him. I wasn't going to see all that thrown away because of his foolish involvement with a fifteen-year-old girl."

"There was another way," Father Crumlish said heavily.

"Not for *my* son!" The old man glared in defiance at the priest. "The girl agreed to leave Lake City. And she had plenty of money to live comfortably. I saw to that."

God help us, the pastor thought as he stared at old Cullen with a mixture of contempt and sorrow.

"Who was the girl?" Madigan asked.

Again there was a moment's uneasy silence. John's face was impassive. "I'll not be the one to volunteer that information," he finally replied.

Madigan turned to Ellen. "Do you know?"

A brief expression of indecision flickered on her face. Then she clamped her lips shut and sat silent.

The policeman gestured impatiently. "All right. I'll let that go for the time being." Abruptly he swung around to Ned. "Right now I want the truth from you. Were you the man Miss Flynn saw going into your office?"

The policeman's question seemed to complete young Cullen's demoralization. "I—" He swabbed his sweaty face with a handkerchief. "Yes, but—"

"Then you *did* see her message from Father Crumlish about Patrick Ireland? You knew who he was? You saw him?" Big Tom's questions were fired in rapid succession.

Ned turned an anguished face to John. "Dad," he began.

"No!" Again the old man cut him off, his voice still thunderous and commanding. He shook a finger at the Lieutenant. "I know the law, young man. My son and I will answer your questions only in the presence of our lawyer."

Madigan's face flushed scarlet as he stood up. "The sooner the better, Mr. Cullen," he said coldly.

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The priest also got to his feet, somewhat unsteadily because the turbulence in his heart and mind had begun to take their toll of his slight body. Nevertheless, he placed a gentle hand on Ned Cullen's arm.

"Ned," he said in a low tone. "We both know you did a grievous wrong to the girl, whoever she is. And much worse to the poor homeless boy. But if you had anything to do with his murder—"

"No, Father!" Ned's voice trembled. "I—I didn't."

Father Crumlish gave him a long penetrating look. But Cullen's eyes shifted away from him. God help us, the priest said to himself once again. Then, despite his dismay, he braced himself, and his hand on Ned's arm was steady. "Whatever the outcome, lad," he said, "count on me. And on the good Lord."

The pastor had spent a restless night. Moreover, he'd just lost a battle with Emma Catt. Why, he wondered in exasperation, did the woman insist that his breakfast eggs be either soft-boiled or poached when she knew perfectly well that he preferred them fried? Therefore, it was a bright note when Emma informed him that Madigan was waiting in the rectory office, although the priest had an ominous feeling that what the policeman would have to say would not be particularly cheering. He was right.

"Ned Cullen is a guilty man if I ever saw one," Madigan said, running a big hand through his crisp brown hair. "But I'll never get enough evidence to prove it."

Father sat silent and waited.

"Cullen says that the first time he was in his office since the start of the meeting in the morning was when Ellen saw him. He wanted to get his car keys, he says, to drive himself and the old man home." Big Tom frowned. "But there were eleven people at that meeting, Father. And just before lunch the room was darkened to show the film of a new product. So Ned could have slipped out of the room a dozen times without anyone being the wiser."

"You think he did, Tom?"

Madigan nodded. "I think he went to his office during Ellen's lunch hour to check his desk and see if there were any important messages. It would be the normal thing for a man in his position to do. Well, he finds your message about Patrick Ireland and he panics." Big Tom paused to light a cigarette. "Panic affects a man's mind, Father. I've seen it happen a hundred times. And I'm sure that's what happened to Ned Cullen. Remember, Ireland's existence was a much greater threat to Cullen today than it was nineteen years ago. Now Cullen has a socially prominent wife, four kids, and a do-gooder reputation in the community to uphold."

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"That he has," the priest agreed.

"Naturally, as president of the company, Cullen knew the guards' routine—and there are only three guards on eight-hour duty. So he knew when the guard booth would be vacant, and he had the key to the gun box right in his desk drawer. Who would see him—let alone question him—if he went in and out of the booth?" Madigan didn't wait for an answer. "He took Ireland into his office, waited until he was sure Ellen had left, and then shot him. The walls in those offices are soundproof—you could shoot off a cannon and not disturb a soul. Then he went back to the meeting, got old John, and the two of them drove home."

"He told me he never saw my message, Tom."

"Yeah. He still says so." Madigan made a wry grimace. "But he can't explain how one of my men found it crumpled up in the wastebasket under his desk!"

"You could be right, lad," Father said after a long moment. "But what happened nineteen years ago when Ned panicked?"

Madigan eyed him uncertainly. "He went running like a scared rabbit to his old man?"

The pastor nodded. "And then the old man took matters into his own hands. Isn't that the way it was?"

Big Tom gazed thoughtfully into space. "Well, maybe it happened that way again, Father," he said. "But, either way, I'll never prove it." He snorted in derision. "The holier-than-thou Cullens mixed up in murder? Hah!"

Some forty years ago, when Father Crumlish arrived in Lake City to shepherd the lambs—the faithful and the strays—of St. Brigid's, the parish still retained an aura of respectability. True, the elegance which pervaded the area during the gracious horse-and-carriage days had long vanished. Progress, and the fact that St. Brigid's was situated near the center of that progress, around the waterfront, had taken its toll. And what progress hadn't eroded, the Great Depression had.

Thus, through the years, the pastor had seen his parish and his people sink into poverty, desolation, and despair. Dominating the section now were the sometimes thriving, sometimes dormant waterfront industries and, with few exceptions, the sad, drab tenements that reeled drunkenly against broken sidewalks. Sandwiched in between were the usual places of business plus an assortment of dimly lit saloons and pool parlors and an ill-famed straggle of land which was the priest's heaviest cross to bear—Canal Street. As a result, crime flourished on every corner. And Father Crumlish, armed only with an unshakeable faith in his God and his fellow men, fought the Devil with every ounce of his

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physical strength, with the wisdom of his years, and with his unfailing knowledge of his people.

Now, seated tiredly in his worn easy chair which was placed where the waning late-afternoon sunlight might seep through the old-fashioned heavy lace curtains, the priest was immersed in thoughts about the Cullens. Long before his tenure, the family had been established as St. Brigid's "pillars of the church." But when, as a young man, John Cullen took over the management of the prospering iron works, he had moved the family residence out of St. Brigid's parish and into a more pretentious and affluent section of Lake City.

It was in this upper-class atmosphere that young Ned grew into his teens—a wild, reckless boy who, Father knew, managed to stay out of serious trouble only through the intervention of his influential father. Then suddenly Ned dropped out of sight. On his return some years ago with a college degree and an honorable discharge from the Air Force, he had undergone a decisive change. He was as the priest knew him today—a sober, reliable, highly respected and hard-working businessman. Never had there been the slightest clue to link him with the disgraceful incident revealed today.

Emma Catt's imperative voice, reminding him that he had a dinner to eat and Devotions at 7:30, broke into Father's thoughts. He indulged himself in his favorite expletive—"Hellfire!" Then, wincing a bit from the arthritis in his kneecaps, he got to his feet. He was in no mood for food. But he was in no mood either for another battle with a seemingly unbeatable foe.

Father Crumlish knelt facing his parishioners as he recited the Litany of the Saints, waiting patiently after each phrase for them to voice the proper response. As usual, Ellen Flynn knelt straight-backed in a pew close to the altar, her head bowed, her voice booming, and also as usual, her words lagging.

"From all evil," Father said.

"O Lord deliver us," came the response. From everyone except Ellen.

"—dee-liverr—uss," she soloed.

Mindful of his sacred surroundings, the pastor tried to curb his impatience. After all, he reminded himself, Ellen had not had an easy life. Artie had always been a shiftless no-account who spent every free moment leaning an elbow on McCaffery's bar. And as for their young sister, Kate, despite Ellen's strict discipline, the rebellious girl had run off.

"From sudden and unlooked for death" . . . "From the snares of the devil" . . .

"O Lord deliver us."

"—dee-liverr—uss."

The priest clicked his tongue against his upper plate. Does the woman imagine I have all the time

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in the world, he wondered, thoroughly exasperated. Does she have so much time on her own hands that—?

Father shifted his knees abruptly as his mind began to defy an impossible thought. And yet . . .

"From anger, and hatred, and every evil will," he intoned slowly, ever so slowly. And this time he barely heard the response.

All the houses on Ellicott Street, save one, clung precariously together—a listless tangle of rupture, rust, and rot. The exception was a small neat cottage resting a comfortable distance from the street. Starched white curtains stood at attention like sentinels guarding the black-trim window frames.

Father Crumlish mounted the cottage's few steps and rang the doorbell. Artie Flynn, a beer can in his hand, seemed startled when he opened the door.

"Ahhh—Father. Come in."

The pastor stepped into a compact, low-ceilinged living room, and Ellen got up from a chair and greeted him. Father selected a stiff-back horsehair sofa, sat on it, and came straight to the point.

"I haven't inquired for a number of years, but now I think it's time I did. Where's Kate?"

Ellen opened her mouth to speak but Artie quickly interrupted her.

"Years ago—out West—a car crash." He tipped the beer can to his mouth and gulped.

Father sat silent for a moment as Ellen dabbed at her eyes.

"So they're both dead," the priest said slowly. "Mother and son . . . Why didn't you tell me?"

"I—I—" Ellen began shakily, then stopped and looked at Artie.

"That's water over the dam, Father," he said with a shrug. "Kate lit out. We never heard from her, never saw her again—until the night she showed up here after she'd left the kid at the church. Then she took off again and—well, that's all."

"I told her she was a fool," Ellen said bitterly. "Ned Cullen would have married her—I'd have seen to that! But she wouldn't listen, didn't seem to care." She covered her face with her hands.

"It must have been a hard thing for you and Artie to see the chance of a lifetime slip through your fingers," Father said. "The Cullen name, their money. But you've had some compensation. The two of you have had easy, good-paying jobs for a lot of years. And concealing Kate's death from the Cullens was like an insurance policy." He gave Ellen a pitying look. "But that wasn't enough for you. What you *really* wanted was revenge."

Ellen stared at the pastor with suddenly wary eyes. "Wha—what are you saying, Father?"

"I'm saying that it took you a long time—nineteen years—before you had a chance to get back at Ned and John Cullen. And you

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had a lot of time—almost a whole day, from the time I called—to plot how you could punish Ned, how you would frame him for a terrible crime. It was an easy thing for you to take the key from his desk and sneak out the gun. You typed up my message as you said. But you made sure he wouldn't find it. You crumpled it up and threw it in his wastebasket where you knew the police would be sure to look."

"Now wait a minute, Father," Artie protested. "You can't come in here and accuse Ellen of—of murder!"

"I can—and I do." Father said sternly.

Under the priest's steady unrelenting gaze Ellen's composure cracked. Her face flamed scarlet as she sprang to her feet. "Ned Cullen is a murderer! I proved it, didn't I? Lieutenant Madigan believes it, and that's all that matters!" Her voice rose hysterically as she shook her finger at the pastor. "Now he's going to have to pay with more than money for what he did to Kate. Now the whole world will know he's guilty."

Is he? Even of the lesser sin? Father wondered, remembering Kate Flynn: a bold-eyed, too-wise-for her years, flashy little chit. Although he by no means condoned their behavior, Father wondered too if perhaps Ned and Kate were not innocent victims, both of them—Ned the victim of an over-ambitious, overprotective father, and Kate the victim of a sister with a waspish, warped mind. Yes, both of them—

Ellen's strident, incoherent words intruded on the pastor's private thoughts.

"—and Artie and I, we don't need the Cullens' precious money any more. I've saved lots of it—enough so we can get away from here." Her voice trailed off as Artie placed an awkward arm around her shoulders.

Father Crumlish glanced out the window and saw that the telephone call he'd made before he left the rectory had been productive. A police car had just pulled up to the curb and Big Tom Madigan was striking up the walk.

Sometime later, Madigan, sitting with the pastor in the rectory living room, asked, "What put you on to her, Father?"

"Time, lad."

"Time?" The Lieutenant looked puzzled.

"Never, in all my years, have I come across a person who took so much time saying the responses." The priest shook his head. "A sore trial it's been for me, having to listen to Ellen Flynn's voice—loud enough to wake the dead, mind you—lagging behind everybody else."

The policeman couldn't help suppressing a chuckle.

"I was saying the Litany of the Saints," Father went on, "thinking

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to myself that whoever killed that poor boy was someone who had plenty of time to plan the deed. Someone with a heart and a mind full of—" Father paused, brushed a hand through his still-thick, snow-white hair, and quoted: "From anger, and hatred, and every evil will—"

"O Lord deliver us," Madigan responded automatically.

The pastor nodded. "I heard Ellen's solo, then I remembered Kate, and I began to wonder—" Again he broke off. "May the Lord have mercy on them all."

For a few minutes the priest and the policeman sat in thoughtful silence. Then suddenly Father brightened.

"Would you put the kettle on, Tom?"

"Sure, Father," Madigan said.

"And while you're out there, you'll find a bottle with a bit of Irish whiskey in it; goes well as a tea sweetener, don't you think, lad?"

"None better I know of," Big Tom said, grinning.

The pastor mused a little later, as he drained the last of his spiked tea, "A face-lifting wouldn't do the orphanage a bit of harm, I've been thinking. And maybe it's time to build a whole new wing."

"Oh, sure! And where do you expect to get the dough?" Madigan snorted. "Impossible."

"Impossible, is it!" Father's seamed face broke into a smile. He was recalling the urgent message he'd received earlier from old John Cullen, requesting an appointment for himself and his son right after the last Mass tomorrow morning. "Say a prayer to St. Jude," Father Crumlish said, nodding confidently. "Nothing's impossible!"

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a *NEW* Regent's Club story by

STEPHEN BARR

It is a pleasure to welcome back Dr. Sylvan Moore, the oldest member of the Regent's Club, with one of his puzzling, provocative riddles-in-crime—and this is perhaps the most ingenious murder problem Dr. Moore has ever recounted in the smoking room of the Regent's.

Do you know a rhyme for the word "month"? There is one, you know . . .

THE N-PLUS-1th DEGREE

by STEPHEN BARR

"THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER," young Hocking said, "April, May, and December." He looked jauntily pleased with himself, and glanced around the smoking room of the Regent's Club, where the conversation was taking place.

"Apart from your getting two of the months wrong," one of the new members, a lawyer, said, "it was obviously meant to rhyme with a particular month. That gives nine possibilities, because September, November, and December all rhyme, and January—"

"Now, don't tell me," interrupted Hocking, "that you agree with me and Walter Cronkite and say Feb-you-ary, too! The so-called correct pronunciation is ridiculous—"

"No, I'm only referring to the last two syllables; they have the same feminine rhyme, and—"

"I once sent him a rhyme about it," went on Hocking. "Trouble is, I sent it to station CBC by mistake, so he probably never got it. Want to hear it? The rhyme, I mean."

No one answered so he recited:

"What is so rare as a day in June?
The student's eyes grew wary;
Not to, he said, be picayune,
A day in February!

"It shows how unnatural the pronunciation really is, and it also has a perfectly legal split infinitive, because—"

"I'm afraid you're all wasting your time," interrupted our oldest member, Dr. Sylvan Moore. "You

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must be going by the old newspaper accounts. *The New York Times* had it more or less right, but you probably saw the *Daily Mirror*—very inventive."

"No, as a matter of fact I looked it up in old copies of the *Graphic* when I was in New York this spring," said the lawyer. "I gather it was the world's first 'tabloid,' as they call them there."

"I'm afraid you're wrong about that, too," Dr. Moore said. "The *New York Graphic* was started in imitation of our *Daily Mirror,* and, I might add, covered the news in a similar sensationalizing way. It was the old *World* that had the best report—I think *The Times* felt the story was too odd to be quite fit to print or at least to give the reasoning behind it. And the reasoning depended on the avoidance of cliché thinking. The whole case was a question of degree."

"Oh, I see what you mean," said a logician on the next sofa. "As opposed to a question of kind."

"No," said Dr. Moore. "It was a kind of degree—"

"Like Ph.D. and so," said the lawyer, and smiled. "Or do you mean something like the Third Degree?"

"Of course he doesn't," Hocking said. "He's referring to the n-plus-, or maybe it was the nth degree business. You see she was explaining how much—"

"Who was?" asked another member.

"Why, the wife of the accused of course. She was showing how certain she was that he was innocent. She said she believed in him that much."

"When people talk about the nth degree," said Dr. Moore, "they think it means as far as possible, but it doesn't necessarily. It means 'to a *given* degree,' and that leaves room for improvement. If we forget its mathematical implications, it can mean that we have an ace in the hole."

"Well she said it to show how much she believed in her husband, didn't she?" Hocking said.

"I suppose you mean that she used 'n-plus-1th' in that context," Dr. Moore said. "As it happened she used 'nth degree' to describe her belief in him. The other came later—and is the basis of the solution of the murder, so if you chaps will keep quiet for a bit, I'll tell you the story . . ."

(EDITORS' NOTE: *Confused? Baffled? Perplexed? Read on!*)

It was not only a matter of degree (Dr. Moore said), but a matter of misunderstandings and cliché thinking. I was in New York at the time—May of 1926—and the English papers were too busy with the General Strike to pay much attention to an American murder case; and since the actors in this drama were not famous, and everything turned out as well as a murder can, the papers resorted to

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mild quips—like the rhyme to "month," which you appear to have misunderstood. What I would call a journalistic misunderstanding arises out of the expectation of cliché happenings.

For example, a very spectacular attempt at murder was once being described in front of a young reporter; a prominent public figure, they said, was to have been killed by switching the contents of a champagne bottle, and that was all he waited to hear. He dashed off and phoned in to his paper that Mr. So-and-So was to have been poisoned.

The actual truth was far more newsworthy: the famous person was not going to drink the champagne, but to christen a ship, and the substitute was nitroglycerine.

In the case of the rhyme to "month," the point is that there isn't supposed to be one. The wife of the accused—he was an absent-minded mathematician—had complete faith in him; that is to say she *knew* he could never murder anyone, let alone plan it. According to the reporter on the *Graphic,* the polite lieutenant said she believed in him to the nth degree, and she replied, "No; to the n-plus-1th"—and there's your rhyme to month. It wasn't quite said that way, but anyhow, the *Graphic's* reporter spotted it, and for some reason it went the rounds, with no credit to Dr. Whewell, the reputed originator.

What's odd was that there *was* one of the oldest crime clichés involved, and no one noticed it. It first got into print in A. Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*: When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth. And when you believe something to the nth degree, anything that runs counter to it *is* impossible, and that was the advantage Janet Ford had over the extremely efficient New York Homicide Squad.

When I say Bill Ford was absent-minded, I mean his powers of observation were subservient to his powers of concentration and if he went out in nonmatching socks it was because he'd worked out some terrific equation in his head, and socks didn't matter. But he wouldn't walk out into the middle of traffic. Janet knew this and ran interference for him, as they say in American football. The murdered man, Brewster, was a recognized pest who had tried to date her. She was very attractive, and brought out the wolf in a lot of men, who mistook her look of interest and curiosity for a come-on.

Brewster was found shot in the head with a .32 bullet, and his own S&W revolver at the far end of the room. Same caliber, and the correct barrel scorings on the bullet. Janet was out apartment-hunting on the day of the murder and so was Bill; but being what he was, he was completely vague as to

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where he was and at what time, so he had no alibi. They had split up so as to cover more ground; they'd made two lists, but he didn't remember in which order he'd followed his, and he was one of those mouse-colored medium-height people who defy exact description.

There's an erroneous idea that doctors can fix the precise time of death by examining the body. The accuracy depends on various things—for example, temperature, which is unreliable on a spring day with the windows open, and anyway the body will be as cold as its surroundings twenty-four hours after death. Then chemical reactions, which vary in such a short time. About all they could say was that Brewster had eaten something an hour or so before death. As to time all they were sure of was sometime the day before.

Brewster lived in a hotel, and his body was discovered by the maid who summoned help without going into his suite. It is just possible to shoot oneself in the head, and with a final spasm throw the gun across the room; so it was a possible suicide, except that Brewster was not the type, and he was known to have many enemies. That kind of wolf usually has—as someone said at the Players Club, "All the world hates a lover."

Anyway, the police took Brewster's fingerprints, and they didn't match with the three found on the gun—a pearl-handled revolver quite common in those days. So it probably wasn't suicide—almost certainly, as he had no gloves on. It is, of course, possible to hold a gun with forefinger and thumb, the latter on the trigger, and leave no prints, since the mother-of-pearl was in the form of panels on the sides of the butt; but there was no reason for Brewster to have done that.

The police began asking around, and soon heard about Brewster's latest attempted conquest—Janet. That led to Bill, and his fingerprints *did* match the ones found on the revolver. He said that (a) he never went near Brewster's hotel, (b) he had complete faith in Janet's statement that she despised Brewster, so he scarcely had a motive, and (c) he had never held that or any other firearm in his life. Janet believed him, the police, not unnaturally, did not. He was held for indictment, bail denied, and the police felt they had solved the case.

Janet was in an uproar; she demanded they go on with the investigation, and they reluctantly agreed. They questioned the renting agents or superintendents who might conceivably have given Bill Ford some sort of alibi but as the police lieutenant pointed out, it wasn't a case of alibi since none of the visits could be matched with the uncertain time of the murder, and Bill could have gone to the hotel at any of several intervals.

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In any event, his prints were on the revolver butt, and he had denied having held it, or any gun. As Lieutenant Alfieri said, you can't transfer fingerprints, but Janet insisted it *must* have been done, because Bill was telling the truth.

New York is a big city but Greenwich Village—particularly in the 20's—was more like what it's called, and word of the murder got around even before the papers gave the news. The whole thing happened very quickly—Brewster was shot on Monday, the body was found early Tuesday morning, and Bill Ford was arrested Tuesday afternoon.

Janet somehow persuaded Alfieri to start checking alibis that same afternoon—he was a very perceptive policeman, and her intensity impressed him. It was something more than love. The trouble was that all the apartments on their lists were in Greenwich Village, and so was Brewsters' hotel—on West 8th Street, right around the corner from Macdougal Alley, where Bill admitted going to see an apartment; but being what he was, he had no idea that it contradicted his claim that he'd not been near the hotel.

The owner of the apartment was quite helpful, and was in fact the only one who could definitely give the time of Bill's visit. He'd given Bill the key and let him go up and look for himself. "He came in here about four on Monday," he said, "and as I was busy I said to go on up. He was there fifteen minutes at least, but he came down and said it was too big and they didn't want a studio anyway. I had to remind him to give me back my key. A vague type."

So there it was; no alibi, strong circumstantial evidence—fingerprints—and a motive. Open and shut, Lieutenant Alfieri thought, but Janet mesmerized him.

"The motive is ridiculous," she said, "because he believed me when I said I hated Brewster, and besides, if he tells me he didn't do it, he didn't. As for the prints—something's wrong."

Alfieri tried, against his better judgment, to give an explanation of the prints, because he really wanted to believe her. "Perhaps somebody conned your husband into picking up the gun at some time," he suggested.

But Janet would have none of it. "Bill may be vague, but he knows a revolver when he sees one. He has an aversion to firearms, and he says he's never touched one, so he hasn't. He's too mathematical, or logical, to tell lies—he's too set on expressing truth, and he's not in the least vague about that, in spite of what the landlord thinks."

"Hm," said Alfieri, "that landlord's a rough type—he's not the kind to help people out; in fact, he knew all about the arrest and

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wouldn't blame Bill Ford if he *had* done it—Brewster being the type of Lothario he was."

I got into the case because Janet called me for advice. I'd met them at Oxford the year before, and Bill and I had discussed symbolic logic. Janet occasionally joined in—her comments were intuitional rather than dialectic, and brought us back to earth in a most clarifying way. I suppose it was logic that solved the case, but not police logic—Janet logic. And yet it was not that old cliché called woman's intuition. When you discuss something you have to start with *some* assumption, and hers was that Bill was telling the truth; so she eliminated what to her was the impossible, and what remained was that somehow the fingerprints had been faked.

But how? Of course you can make a cast in rubber of a man's fingertip and with it put his print on anything, but he'd be aware of it, unless he were in a drugged sleep. I said all that to Janet, and all she replied was, "When is a door not a door?"

Well, the answer to that old riddle is "When it's ajar." She was right in implying that we were faced with a riddle; what remained, no matter how improbable, must be the truth. But what, as has been said so many times, is, or was, the truth?

"It isn't like you to speak in riddles," I remarked.

"It's because I'm faced with, and thinking in, riddles. A riddle wrapped in a mystery in an enigma,"—no, she couldn't have said that because Churchill didn't say it until the second World War. There I go doing the very thing she was trying to avoid! She was silent for a while, and then turned to me and said, "Let's go and look at the studio on Macdougal Alley."

"What on earth can you hope to find there?"

"We've got to begin somewhere. I've already asked Bill—Lieutenant Alfieri's a peach—he said I could see Bill as often as I want; and Bill was as vague as usual except that there were five rooms counting the studio—too big. Let's go as Mr. and Mrs. Moore, and you do the talking."

"What are we looking for?"

"A jar."

"Well, I phoned the address on Macdougal Alley and a gruff voice said the studio was still vacant, and asked my name. I put on my strongest Savile Row accent and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Moore." As we left the hotel she went to the desk, and explained to me that she'd said she'd be back at six if anyone called. I had got the impression the desk clerk looked distressed, which was not too surprising since one of their guests was an accused murderer. On the way downtown I said, "I still don't understand what we're after—I can't see the logic in it."

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"The logic," Janet replied, "lies in our remembering that the new truth is bound to be improbable. All we have to go on is that somehow fingerprints have been transferred—or if that, as you and Alfieri say, is truly impossible, then something else happened—some other transformation. I want to see the landlord and the studio apartment."

"But why not the other places that Bill visited?"

"Because he phoned for an appointment—it asked to in the ad—it was the only one that did."

The landlord looked like his voice—abrupt and domineering, and it showed in the face of his wife who stood beside him, and whom he introduced as "the missus." A willowy little blonde with nervous eyes and wearing what today would pass as a miniskirt—they were wearing them in 1926, although the Flapper Style had a very different effect—they were revolting against something quite different. I was rather surprised to notice that she seemed to be giving me the eye—and at the same time had a self-satisfied look as though I was responding, which I most certainly would not have been in the presence of her brutal and touchy-looking husband.

"Hope you don't mind stairs," he said. "It's five floors."

As we followed him up the stairs Janet muttered something. I turned and looked at her quizzically, and she smiled and whispered, "Now for the jar!" I mentally agreed—anything that would further our seemingly hopeless search would jar me—I could see no rhyme nor reason to it. How, I asked myself, could looking at an empty apartment tell us how a set of fingerprints had been transferred? Or how fingerprints had been taken on a mold without the awareness of the owner?

The top-floor apartment was quite big—two bedrooms looking south over the Alley and a dining-room-kitchen, and to the north a very large studio with tilted skylight. The previous tenant had left no furniture, but the walls were painted buff, which was almost universal in the 20's in New York, and the woodwork was dark maroon.

The landlord opened the doors in turn, saying, "You get a real kitchen, and we pay the gas, every modern fixture, and a *reely* big stugeo for whoever's artistically inclined. Seventy-five per. Garbage collected twice a week."

Janet looked around and said, "Yes—just as Bill said, no furniture."

The landlord stiffened and said, "Bill?" Then he blinked and said, "No, it's unfurnished like it says in the ad."

Janet turned to him. "Have you got a screwdriver?"

The landlord and I looked at her with equal astonishment, except

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that there was something more in his face.

"A what, lady?" he said. "And what would you need it for?"

"I just wanted to know, because you must have used one."

His eyes seemed to wabble. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "I never—"

He turned away and started hurrying down the stairs. We hurried after, and to my surprise Alfieri and two detectives met him at the office door.

"I want you to come to Homicide and answer some questions," the lieutenant said, and the landlord slumped the way bullies do when confronted by superior force. It turned out that Janet had asked her hotel desk clerk to phone Alfieri.

"The dilemma that I faced," Janet told me later, "was that Bill left his prints on the gun *without touching it*. Prints cannot be transferred, so the gun had been transformed in some way, but how can one disguise a gun? As what? I thought about it until my head nearly split—and then I phoned Lieutenant Alfieri, and he said, yes, the prints were only on the butt—on the handle.

"But what in heaven's name has a handle like a revolver? And mother-of-pearl at that. I thought of a dagger, with a bent handle, but that's a weapon, too, and Bill would have noticed.

"The kind of thing that people like Bill don't notice is the color of a sock. He'll put one on his left foot and then put on the left shoe, so by the time he's putting on the second sock he's forgotten the color of the first because it didn't matter to him in the first place. But how can you disguise a revolver butt? At first I thought, well, small things have small handles, but then it dawned on me that one very common, fairly large object has a small handle—a door.

"Bill never noticed that the handle to the studio door had mother-of-pearl panels on it—it's a lever handle, you see, and the landlord must have taken the panels off the revolver butt and screwed them on the door handle, and *his* prints were on the *inside* of the panels."

And that is precisely what he admitted to Alfieri. When she got through saying all this to him, the lieutenant said he'd be jiggered—and then, "Wait! Hold on, there! How did the landlord know to get the revolver panels on that door in time? I realize you believe in your husband, as you say, to the nth degree—but you've got it backwards!"

"No," said Janet, "Forwards. When Bill phoned and gave his name it must have clicked with the landlord—he'd heard about Brewster going after me, everyone in the Village had, and he'd been through it himself with that wiggly

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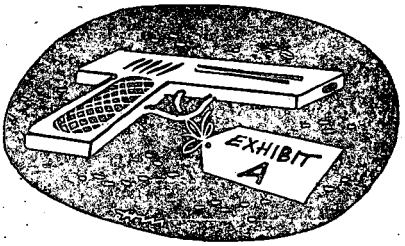
little wife of his—I saw her making eyes at you! So when Bill phoned, he said, "Okay, come at four"—it must have been around three when Bill phoned—and buzzed over to Brewster's and shot him; he took the revolver back to his place, transferred the panels to the door, then put the gun back in Brewster's room—no one notices comings and goings in that kind of crummy hotel—and then back again to his own place, just in time for Bill."

So the improbable happened—and Janet had gone to the n-plus-1th degree.



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The author, John F. Campbell, is a Foreign Service Officer who, at the time he wrote "Hard Cheese; or, For Queen and Country," was American Consul at Asmara, the legendary birthplace of the Queen of Sheba and present-day capital of Eritrea in northern Ethiopia. In George Ball's book titled THE DISCIPLINE OF POWER, *the former United States Ambassador to the United Nations described Mr. Campbell as follows: "that redoubtable fellow, John F. Campbell, who, in spite of his training as a professional diplomat—and a good one at that—can still look a simple declarative sentence in the eye without blanching."*

So Mr. Campbell knows his scene, knows the people he writes about, and can look them in the eye without blanching—which, as you will see, is no small achievement. Of his tale of espionage and international intrigue he feels that "the conclusion will probably strike some minds as surrealistic"—though it may seem sheerest realism to some of the ex-colonial, expatriate Englishmen who inhabit the Red Sea Coast.

Which gives you merely a hint of what is coming . . . Some readers will interpret Mr. Campbell's story in one way, other readers in a different way. We don't want to influence the direction of your judgment—but in a curious fashion both interpretations may, we think, be equally valid . . .

HARD CHEESE; *or, For Queen and Country*

by JOHN F. CAMPBELL

"CRAPPO!" THE ROLLING DICE were a blur on the green baize table. Then the small white dots came in focus. Four and three, and the House had won again.

There were the usual sighs and groans and curses, the easing of tension. A high-skirted, droop-bosomed blonde with onyx pierced earrings fainted. Somebody said she was the grandniece of a famous author.

One man alone was silent amid the gabble and glass tinkle of the glittering gaming room. A silly smile on his face, a stain of Sauce Béarnaise on the right lapel of his brown Harris tweed, Major (ret.) Rupert Gore-Bromley, D.S.O., idled away from the dice table.

"Monsieur!"

Fortyish and beginning to wonder whether or not corsets under the cummerbund were quite the

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thing to trim the figure, the major sauntered on in search of a door marked *hommes—Herren—caballeros—W.C.* He absent-mindedly scratched at an armpit, fingers clawing the bulge of the Webley .47 caliber repeater that filled nature's cavity.

"Monsieur!"

He had just dropped half a week's salary on borrowed chips. Hard cheese, but with £50,000 in Special Funds tucked away in the hotel vault, nothing to lose sleep over. Perhaps he could make up the loss at the fan-tan table, or playing odds and evens in the roulette casino down the Grand Corso or at backgammon at the Cercle Sportif Anglais.

"Monsieur!"

A fattish Frenchman—no, it was that tiresome Italian, Baron Salerno—tugged at his free elbow and spun him round.

"I say!"

"Monsieur 'as forgotten the chips which I 'ave borrowed him, isn't it?"

"Oh, right-ho! Umm . . . don't seem to have a pen on me just now. Send the check round to your hotel, what?"

The Baron produced a writing instrument with three retractable ink colors and his debtor, frowning under a chestnut toothbrush mustache, selected red and scribbled away. "Man stinks of Cologne," Gore-Bromley observed in silence. "Rum lot. But let it pass."

It was the Baron's turn to frown now, twisting the check in large flabby hands.

"I believe, Major—"

"Not a military man, old boy. Carstairs the name, Manfred Carstairs. Albion Investors Trust. At your service." And he brought out a business card to prove it.

"Ah," sighed Salerno, "one cannot be too discreet." Then, still examining the check after a pregnant pause, "The ox runs with the sheep."

Carstairs instantly became Gore-Bromley again, reciting by rote the answer to the long-awaited signal. "The cheese is hard."

"Blindfold the archbishop," replied the Baron on cue, casting away the stub of a black and gold Sobranie filter-tipped cigarette as he scurried back toward the dice table.

Gore-Bromley stooped to tie a wayward shoelace, his grimace as he did so revealing a wide gap between two front teeth. A finger fanned the floor ever so casually and a cigarette stub somehow found its way under the tongue of the shoe. In the W.C., locked behind a stall door, he read the message inscribed on the inside of the recessed filter—*One o'clock at Intime's*—and flushed it away.

He adjusted his toupee with care, grinning into the washroom mirror. The grandmotherly lavatory attendant seemed asleep next to one of the urinals but he remembered to leave a newly minted franc,

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One o'clock at Intime's meant three hours to kill. He always liked to have a woman before a big job. And this job was big, else why the wet of perspiration dripping over the soft collar of his checked dacron and cotton Golden Needle ready-made shirt? Why the ruddy, bulbous nose in the mirror looking ruddier?

Plenty of time for a woman, but first a ritual of duty to perform. He stepped onto the dark terrace that looked down on the Mediterranean. A warm mistral was blowing, or was it a sirocco? Some ruddy foreign word, anyway.

Six miles out, H.M.S. Redoubtless stood at anchor waiting for his message. He signaled slowly, his pencil-beam flashlight aimed at the stars: "C-O-N-T-A-C-T M-A-D-E."

A minute's pause to receive and decode, then a flicker of answering flashes from the ship which he strained to catch: "J-O-L-L-Y G-O-O-D S-H-O-W."

The gambling rooms were full of desirable women. He coughed up some phlegm into a pocket handkerchief, smoothed his eyebrows, and pulled down his plus-fours. Hell, he could have any woman in the place. It would be too easy, really. Hardly sporting.

He hurried through the ornate vestibule and down to the street, stepped into his powder-blue Austin-Healey Sprite, and fumbled for the key with the rental-agency tag. Two hours and forty-five minutes to go. Plenty of time for a woman. There was a grinding noise between first and second gears. He would have a look at the street girls. Something tall and leggy.

It was a silly drill, all these codes and signals. One got accustomed to it in Secret Service work, one made do. Not that anyone called it "the Secret Service" any more, outside of novels and newspapers. One used the proper bureaucratic slang. One worked for W.O.O.O.P., an obscure subdepartment of the Ministry for Overseas Development.

They kept reorganizing things, juggling them round, changing cover. A year ago the Intelligence Bureau had been located in the Transport Ministry. Before that for a time the official cover was the Communicable Diseases Division of the Health Minister's shop.

He had thought of resigning, on principle, the day the Socialists won the last general election. Lot of blighters. Filthy politicians. Running down the country, giving away the Empire. But let it pass. One did what one had to do. No ruddy trade-unionists in the Bureau, anyway.

The Sprite glided downhill and turned left onto a business street. Lights from hotels. French sailors with red pom-pons. Girls.

Perhaps he should have a look-in at Lolo's, where they made a passably dry martini. Tonic for the nerves to toss down a little honest gin. Rum business, this. Why had

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the Director been so damnably vague? "Go out and have a look at the chap. Make contact and report back. Fishy, but might be something in it. Draw on Unvouchered Funds in the usual amount. Keep in touch." Then the traditional secret handclasp and a hearty, "Cheerio!"

Three weeks ago to the day it had been, at the foul-smelling office near Foyle's in Charing Cross Road. Ruddy awful place to locate the headquarters of Her Majesty's cloaks and daggers. Lot of mumbo jumbo. Ass of a Director. But Gore-Bromley had read and memorized the file anyway. In two hours and fifteen minutes he would meet the chap.

Maybe the blighter wanted to defect. Or perhaps he just had something to sell. That was the usual thing. He had never come to the British before, which made it all rather odd. W.O.O.O.P. knew a lot about him of course—every self-respecting intelligence service had a file on Dr. Horst Wessel, the Swiss-Alsatian scientist. Scientist or charlatan, no one could really say. The only photograph they had on file was ten years old. Probably the Americans knew more, or the Russians.

Curious chap, this Wessel character. Turned up in Tel Aviv during the Arab-Israeli War. Deuced odd. And he just happened to be at Lop Nor in '64 when the Chinese set off their bomb. Someone very much like him was the first white man to identify Lumumba's body at Elizabethville in '60. Curious how he managed to get around. What had he been doing in an unmarked patrol craft in the Sea of Japan a few hours before the North Koreans seized an American intelligence ship? The shareholders of Albion Investors Trust would like to know.

The lights of Lolo's loomed. Going in he grinned wickedly at the hatcheck girl and again at the Japanese bartender. Before he had time to attract one of the busy bar girls or even finish his first martini a disgustingly friendly face appeared from his right side, the weak side of his profile.

"Professor!"

A smack on the shoulder blades accompanied the stupid greeting. It was an old C.I.A. chum who vied with him in catechizing the history of their professional cooperation.

"Madagascar, '64!"

"Haiti, '59!"

"Chateau Mouton-Rothschild, '47!"

He had last seen the chap a few years back when they were both working under similar "deep cover" as directors of an international peace foundation. He had posed as an academic person on that job and the American, as he recalled, had styled himself "Dr. Phineas Quimby."

"Well, Quimby—"

"Sorry, chum, wrong name. I am

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currently Mr. Jesse Birdsall, European Bureau Chief for Barricades Magazine. Still working the highbrow racket?"

Gore-Bromley pulled out a business card. "Carstairs, investments," and smiled.

"You son of a gun!"

"Shut up, old prune. Have a drink."

"Don't mind if I do. What's yours?"

There is nothing quite like the camaraderie of brother intelligence officers who have worked on the same jobs. Soon the major had almost forgotten about a woman. He was sharing banal trade secrets with his drinking partner while the inscrutable Japanese mixed more martinis. An American, whatever else he might be, was definitely not a foreigner. A slow-minded race, but they had their good qualities.

"Jesse Birdsall" fished in his wallet for snapshots of his wife and kids. After receiving ritual compliments the American talked about his work.

"Been mostly in charitable and fraternal organizations since we last met. The cover keeps getting blown, so you have to move pretty fast. Let's see"—he ticked off with his fingers—"in the past eighteen months I have been successively an officer of the Mother's March Against Polio, Students for a Democratic Society, the Odd Fellows, Spanish War Veterans, Radio Free Monaco—"

He gave up. "What brings you down south?"

"I might inquire the same," chuckled "Manfred Carstairs."

"I suppose you're here to take the waters, you old rascal." Another slap on the back.

"Not at all, old top. We British have no secrets from our loyal American allies. Actually, I'm nosing about looking into some phosphate shipments that have the blighters back at Home Office a trifle curious. Then too there are the missile firings at Cap Ferrat—"

"Chuck it, chum," replied the American. "Okay. And I'm selling machine tools to Norwegian paraplegics. Still"—the voice tailed off to a whisper—"I'm not above giving an old pal a tip."

He stopped to glance around the raucous bar. "Grigor's in town."

"Grigor? Grigor who?"

"Grigor Potemkin of the K.G.B., fathead. Not that they call it the K.G.B. any more. Now it's located in Section Z of the State Committee on Culture and Fine Arts, I'm told."

"Let it pass," mumbled the major.

"Yeah. But I was forgetting. You wouldn't know Grigor by his real name anyway. Maybe if I mentioned a guy you ran into at Scapa Flow in '63 who went by the name of 'Colonel Robinson' it would ring a bell. Friend of the Krogers."

Gore-Bromley rubbed his abdomen in silent recognition. There

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was still a ripe six-inch scar to remind him of an evening's nasty encounter with the Soviet agent. "Robinson, Potemkin, whatever his name is, what's the blighter up to?"

"He calls himself Boris Wilton now. I was hoping you could tell me."

"Hard cheese."

"Okay, play it that way. Anyway he's got himself all dolled up like an old dame. I spotted him cleaning toilets and giving out hand towels in one of the gambling clubs."

The major's mustache twitched. So that was it! The old grandmother, so ostentatiously asleep next to the urinal. Of course! The ruddy place was crawling with intelligence types. Come to think of it he had once seen that grinning Japanese bartender somewhere before. In a uniform sitting behind a desk with maps on the wall: Tokyo, '57.

He looked at his Vacheron & Constantin wrist watch. An hour to go. Still time for a woman. Would the one o'clock meeting prove to be an elaborate ploy in double bluff? Why the Japanese, the Russians, the Americans all involved?

"Have to shove off, old thing. Good to chat about old times. Look me up in London."

"Sure, pal. Don't take any wooden francs. Haw, haw!"

The headlights were still burning in the parked Sprite and the battery was down. The transmission gave a horrible grinding sound as he downshifted into second gear to avoid a truck at the corner. The top was down and a mistral or sirocco or whatever it was still blew in from the Alps. His hotel was a block ahead on the Esplanade.

Something tall and leggy lounged on the sidewalk. He braked sharply and pulled over. "Voulez-vous . . . ?"

Half an hour later the major yawned, buttoned his soiled shirt, and inspected his watch. Thirty minutes to go. Five minute drive up the hill to Intime's. Eight minutes, perhaps.

He pulled on his shoes and stretched. The leather brief case with false initials in gold still sat undisturbed on the luggage rack across the room. Phosphorescent traces still showed up on the handle lock under the fluoroscopic torch that was part of his kit. Not that there was much inside the bag to disturb. Just the latest cumbersome code-key that he never bothered to use—the Complete Works of P. G. Wodehouse, eight volumes, calf. No one mucked around much with book codes any more. But you never knew, so you carried the books just in case. Last year they had used the Fortnum & Mason's catalogue as a key, more sensible than eight heavy volumes in calf. Then Fotherington disappeared in Budapest, catalogue and all. Of

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course the book-key had to be changed.

Twenty-two minutes to go.

He fingered the gun and slipped its safety catch. Must draw some cash out of the vault downstairs. Ten thousand only, an earnest of more of come. Whatever the agent at Intime's wanted, this could only be a preliminary meeting. Safer to leave most of the money stashed in the hotel safe.

He slipped on a Fusileer's cravat and made a perfect butterfly knot. He looked at his fingernails and coughed up some phlegm and noticed the leftover morning mail still lying unopened by the bedside lamp. Unclassified pouch material from the Ministry of Overseas Development. Tax statements, customs declarations, compulsory insurance forms, travel vouchers—all waiting to be completed. Red tape, bloody bureaucracy. Damn Socialists! Mucking Welfare State! Country gone to the dogs. Moral fiber shot to ruddy hell. Ladies who should know better wearing miniskirts in public. Kids growing up without religion. Pornography in the bookstalls all over London. Government kowtowing to a lot of foreigners. No more of the old patriotic spirit. Weird costumes in the streets. Depravity rampant. Faddists, drones, and weaklings everyhere. Socialists. Communists. Same thing really, when you came to think of it. Nobody ever did, that was the trouble. Ought to be shot like mad dogs in the midday sun, and rid the counrty of a damn nuisance. But let it pass.

The hotel cashier counted out crisp new banknotes to specification and Gore-Bromley signed a receipt. Hesitation, then he asked for an additional £5000 just in case.

Nine minutes to go.

He ground the gears of the Austin-Healey Sprite again while driving up the hill. It was a steep incline like the one the Grand Old Duke of York went charging up. Intime's was a little private club, a gambling chalet sitting on top of the Massif at the end of a winding road. It was closed for the season and there were no man-made lights on the Massif, only a quarter moon. Bally spot, this.

He climbed out of the Sprite and had a magnificent vista of the town sloping down to Mediterranean blackness. One could just make out the lights of H.M.S. Redoubtless.

One minute to go.

He lounged up to the chalet, sweating, his inside pocket heavy with the packet of banknotes. The latch clicked and he was inside in pitch darkness. Forgetting to let his pupils accustom themselves, he bumped against chairs and tables and cursed. Then he remembered the flashlight. The sickly sweet odor of real Bulgarian attar of roses clogged his nostrils. It seemed to be coming from the bar. Then a soft light switched on.

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Gore-Bromley tried to look unperturbed though he could see no one else in the room. He coughed out the agreed password:

"God Save the Queen!"

Silence. Then a guttural reply, strange, ominous:

"It's been a hard day's night!"

He strolled casually on toward the Member's Bar, his white and tan Oxford shoes smacking against the parquet floor. Past the swing doors now, and into the bar proper. Standing there against the rail was a stout little man, quite alone, stinking of rosewater and taking snuff. So this was the little blighter in the flesh. No wonder they called him "the gnome of Zurich."

Pink rabbit eyes looked up through thick rimless bifocals. The man sneezed.

"We meet again, old friend!"

The major curtly acknowledged this puzzling greeting. "Dr. Horst Wessel, I presume?"

"Ho, ho!" The little toad was capable of obscene amusement at his private jokes. "That is technically correct. I thought, however, that you might rather remember me under the name I employed on our last encounter, that of 'Captain Doolittle.'"

So that was it, the major reflected, rubbing an old scalp wound. He smiled back. "Of course. The Soco Chico in Tangier, wasn't it? Stupid of me to forget."

"You do me honor to remember."

"Let it pass."

There was a pause while the two men scrutinized each other in the half light. The major switched off his flashlight and put it aside. Dr. Wessel took more snuff. Memories flooded back. What was the little scum's game this time?

The major broke the ice again.

"You had a deputy in Tangier, a Lieutenant Francois as I recall. Whatever became of him?"

"I regret to say there was an unfortunate accident. Sharks."

"Hard cheese."

The doctor sneezed again, his rabbit eyes never wavering. "It is many years since I have had the pleasure to visit England. Tell me, which are the Great Houses? How does the Duchess of Guernsey get on? Is Boodles still the popular club? Is the Ritz still chic? Where do your *cadets du bon famille* spend the Season?"

"I understood that this was a business meeting, not a social call. Doctor."

"Ah, you English. So correct! So proper in all of the forms, isn't it? Ho, ho! A pleasure for me, Major, to do business with an English gentleman."

"What are you selling, Doctor?"

"Ho, ho! You must be so direct, so impetuous. No charging through the bushes. That is how I like to arrange affairs. We dispense with the formalities, isn't it? You are prepared to pay for information?"

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"I have a limited authorization, yes. All is dependent, of course, on the quality of your product. I assume I may inspect any samples which you may have thought to bring along."

"Ho, ho! I like doing business with an English gentleman."

The major arched an eyebrow. "You have had no previous such dealings with us, I believe?"

The short man opened his palms in apology. "There has unfortunately been no occasion. I have in the past found it most practical to confine my activities to the minor countries, the underdogs of the world. My modest services have been received with considerable gratitude and mutual benefit by the obscurer intelligence services—Kurds and Bulgars and, yes, even North Koreans. But I grow older. I tire of dealing with Asiatics and Middle Eastern persons. I find them so—without polish, without flair. So, I believe you would say, 'bloody-minded.' It is pleasant at last to conduct one's affairs on a cultured and gentlemanly basis. Besides," the doctor chuckled, "you English have also become underdogs. At the moment, and I trust you appreciate the delicacy of the remark, no dog could be more under than yours. Ho, ho!"

"Bloody cheek!" thought Gore-Bromley, his mustache twitching. He said aloud with a fine scorn, "I appreciate the delicacy of your position, Doctor, and we English are I am sure much flattered by the attention you now pay us. May I, in the same spirit of delicacy, inquire why your visit coincides with the presence in this city of my opposite numbers from the Soviet, the American, and the Japanese intelligence services, and God knows how many others? How many of us do you play on the same string, Doctor? Are you merchandising the same information to all comers, regardless of race or national origin?"

Dr. Horst Wessel raised a stubby coat sleeve in protest. "My dear sir, you do me gross injustice. You English are a cynical people. You have certain suspicions, no?"

"Yes," hissed the major.

"All is explained, my good fellow. You are a gentleman and will respect a confidence. Straight dealing is my stock in trade. Honesty is the best policy. How could I continue my work on a serious business basis if there was lacking mutual confidence and respect on both sides?"

"Proceed," remarked the major wryly.

"Ah, you understand. You will respect a confidence, no? I so admire you English. Your code of propriety. It is a difficult business, mine, full of risks and complications. You understand. I have many clients. One must eat, after all, one must support two daughters at the Sorbonne, one has one's family responsibilities. But I am

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my own man, I have my pride, my code of profession. You nod your head—I see you understand."

"You might be a trifle more specific, Doctor."

"Ah. You are a man of the world, you will appreciate these things. I have many clients but I am my own man. There is—what do you say?—no hanky-panky, no abuse of one client's confidence to another client. It is true that I have some dealings with the Americans, the Russians, the Japanese. Separate matters, quite apart from my transaction with your principals. Small affairs—terribly routine, I assure you. Exchanges of trade information on a very small scale. One turns a dollar or a ruble where one can, Major. That is good business. Do not let it trouble you that anything decided between the two of us may ever go out of this room. My reputation is my credential—my honor, sir, my most valued asset."

"What are you selling the Americans, then?"

"Ah, you still have doubts. Listen, I shall place all of my whist cards, all of my gin rummy scores onto the table. I will show you how much I trust you, Major. You are a man of honor, an English gentleman. You shall see what small affairs these are, how completely without connection to the greater matters between us two.

"The Americans desire the latest telephone directory for the city of Kharkov. One has come into my possession. You see, it is an affair of the moment, quickly resolved. That you may have greater confidence in me I may also say, in discretion, that I am selling some German liquid fertilizer formulae to the Japanese. The Soviets happen to desire a surveyor's map of Key West, Florida, and I also hope to interest them in some classified data relevant to the thrust of solid-fuel rocket engines—purely technical matters, I assure you. These things are of no interest, of no value to you British.

"For you I have something of infinitely greater import. These Russians and Japanese, they are matters of a few thousands of pounds or Swiss francs. Mere sidelines. With you British it is different. I have come here largely for your benefit. You will see that my product can be conservatively valued in the millions—in the millions, sir. Of course you will have to get in touch with your principals, but I think they can readily assess the correct value without undue and undignified haggling on either side."

"You startle me, Doctor. But let it pass. What proposal do you wish me to convey to my principals?"

The rabbit eyes were cunning. "You said, I believe, that you had a *limited* authorization?"

"Yes. Ten thousand pounds. Perhaps a bit more. What are you selling?"

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The doctor considered. Ten thousand pounds, that is nothing, a bagatelle, even for a sample on consignment. He took some snuff deliberately, sneezed, then spoke up, picking his words with care.

"I have devoted much of my spare time to considering the financial misfortunes of your country. I flatter myself that I have perhaps some unique solutions to offer. They are, quite frankly, priceless, but I could offer them for a modest charge. Times are hard. One has a family. You would be interested, perhaps, in a secret treatise I have written, thoroughly researched at great personal expense, recommending a pullback of all British military forces now stationed east of Dover and a lightning double-devaluation of sterling?"

"No value in that, Professor. The Cabinet approved something along the lines you suggest only last week."

Dr. Wessel did his best to look crestfallen. "Are you perhaps interested in another paper, developed at great expense and in total secrecy at one of the famous American 'think-tanks,' outlining the pros and cons of a scheme for Federal Union with Germany?"

"Rubbish!" thought Gore-Bromley. Then aloud: "No."

"Then your principals may wish to purchase an unpublished 'suppressed' manuscript done for the Ford Foundation on Home Welfare Programs, completed with statistical tables showing how your National Health Service can be put on a paying basis."

"What rot!" thought the major. The fellow must be playing for time. "Herr Doktor, it has been fascinating to renew an old acquaintance. You are a charming host. But I see there is no business to be conducted, so now I must beg to take leave."

"Wait!" The doctor's voice was hard, not pleading. "You are not attracted by my 'second-line' merchandise. So be it. It is of no consequence."

"Quit stalling, Wessel. You are wasting Her Majesty's time."

"Ho, ho! Impetuous again. I like directness. Let us not beat the bushes, eh? Here"—he tapped a thick black bag at his feet—"is the stuff, as your poet remarks, that dreams are made of. Here are informations you would want. Here are the millions of which I spoke."

Gore-Bromley glanced at his watch impatiently. "Damn it, man, get on with the blasted show. I don't have all night, you know."

"Yes, let us be brief. Let us be direct, as you prefer. Here"—again he tapped the bag—"are the full data—names, places, dates, detailed preparations—regarding a conspiracy to assassinate your political leaders and install a new regime by *coup d'etat*." He sucked in his breath and grinned cunningly. "You are surprised, eh?"

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"Monstrous! Who would dare?"

"Slowly, Major, slowly. I promise you there definitely is existing a most serious plot. I possess the information needed to 'put the lid on,' as you say, but time is of the essence. Preparations are already well advanced."

"Who are these fiends? What is the object of their foul conspiracy?"

"The plotters, Major, include a number of your ex-colonial officials, high officers of the military services, civil servants, and men of substance who are distressed with the decline of Britain from her former world eminence—men who are unhappy over the prevailing tax rates and social service charges of the Labour Administration. Persons, in short, who find themselves philosophically ill at ease with what I believe is called your 'Welfare State.' Their object, ridicrous though it sounds, is to raise the nation to its former position of opulence and grandeur. Such a goal, as you will readily agree, is indicative of madness in marked degree. But they have selected their time with care and will surely make a determined bid to seize power unless speedily opposed."

"Your price for this information, Doctor? We shall have to verify it, of course."

"A small retainer will do for now—say, fifty thousand pounds. In return you shall have several names of the more minor participants in the conspiracy. You shall be able to confirm from these data the great importance of the material I retain. Then we can talk more serious sums. But it must be soon."

The major thought fast. "Fifteen thousand is all I have with me." He brought out the packet of notes. "However I can promise a more substantial payment if your allegations prove correct."

"Major, you are a man of honor, an English gentleman. I shall accept, for now, the fifteen thousand pounds. Within seventy-two hours you will be contacted for another meeting and you will come prepared to talk millions."

"That should be time enough. Now, let's have a look at some of your samples."

Dr. Wessel zipped open his black bag and drew out several small index file cards. "Here are two names. Persons acting on the fringes of the conspiracy but unaware of all its precise details. Your police will learn much from them, but not enough to diminish the value of my remaining merchandise. I have hundreds of names, the minutes of clandestine meetings, thorough plans, military diagrams, photographs . . . . The Highest Places are riddled with disaffection. I can only tell you that their time is drawing near."

Gore-Bromley reached for the small lined file cards and read the names. "Good God! Reggie Chol-

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mondeley. He was in my old regiment! And Brigadier Longview, the old fossil! Rusticating in Cornwall, last I heard."

"The conspiracy is more widespread, my dear fellow, than you can yet imagine. We shall meet again very soon, I think."

The major gasped, his mind boggling. The Swiss-Alsatian made to leave, grasping his black bag and remarking once more on the pleasure of dealing with a gentleman. He was nearly out the door when Gore-Bromley, his brain racing, brought out the Webley .47 caliber repeater.

"Filthy swine!" he muttered, drilling two neat sixpence-size holes in the middle of the fellow's back.

Next morning Mr. Manfred Carstairs checked out of his hotel, carrying with him £50,000 and a small black bag. His last signal to H.M.S. Redoubtless read: D-E-E-P W-A-T-E-R-S. T-A-K-I-N-G T-R-I-P-L-E H-U-S-H P-R-E-C-A-U-T-I-O-N-S. G-O-I-N-G T-O G-R-O-U-N-D. B-U-R-N-I-N-G C-O-D-E-S."

This was answered with a jaunty "R-I-G-H-T H-O" from the vessel.

For ten days he dropped out of sight. Chief of Bureau was a trifle concerned, though this sort of thing happened often in intelligence field work.

"Must be hot on the spoor of something triple hush," they said in the small office in the Charing Cross Road. "Ought to re-establish contact almost any time now."

A busy ten days, indeed—days that saw strange landings at disused aerodromes in North Wales, clandestine rendezvous of warships off Land's End, curious comings and goings at Whitehall offices, midnight knocks on Important Doors. But they were also days of solid accomplishments. As Major Rupert Gore-Bromley, D.S.O., boarded the pocket jet that would bring him home at last he could smile, the gap showing between his two front teeth, at a job well done. It was not a commercial jet, but a military plane. Maps with little pins stuck in them, grinning staff officers clustered round, filled much of the passenger compartment.

"Good show!" thought the major to himself, sipping his tea and glancing down at the foolscap pages spread on his knees. "Must get back to work."

He lifted up the papers and began to memorize the words he should know by heart twelve hours from now if everything went as it should:

"I and my brother officers, acting in the Higher Interests of Crown and Country, have today assumed supreme responsibility for the direction of the State. Britain tonight is calm; the rubbish of the old regime is swept away. The House of Lords, ancient home of

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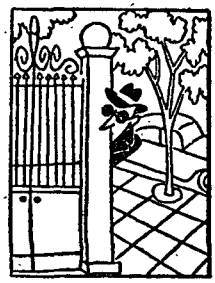
our most glorious traditions, continues to sit. As tomorrow had been declared a holiday, you are all urged to stay at home and display the flag. The several Justices of the Peace are at this moment meting out justice, fairly but firmly, to those few craven politicians guilty of treason against the Realm. The niceties of our hallowed Common Law tradition shall in no wise go unrespected. With God's Grace we shall move forward, as you have every right to hope and expect, to restore Britain and Her Sovereign to their rightful place at the head of the family of nations . . ."



CRIMINALIMERICKS

THE ESPION AGE

by D. R. BENSEN

Since Lomas came in from the chill,
Of spy books we've had a whole hill;
With weapons exotic
And talents erotic,
These agents are licensed to thrill.

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DESPERATE REMEDY

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

THE LIGHT FROM THE SINGLE BULB burning in my office didn't really begin to illumine the hangar and the three single-engine planes it held. When the man came in out of the darkness at the far end, I could hear his footsteps long before I could see him at all. I never thought to look for a gun.

Outside, the heavy clouds that were all that remained of the two-day passing of Hurricane Bella still marched endlessly across the night sky. Inside the office I had the electric heater going in an effort to dry out the place a bit. I'd driven out as soon as the storm stopped to check for possible damage. There wasn't any. Our little Texas town was too far back from the coastline. There was standing water all over the strip though.

When he came into the light and I saw the gun he held, and the look on his face, I began to wish I'd waited till morning to check up.

He was about average in height and on the weedy side, with almost bloodless lips and pale gray eyes. His Stetson was expensive and so was his suit, but that had been rain-soaked and then had wrinkle-dried on his body. He carried a black suitcase in his left hand. That wasn't important. The short-barreled .38 special Police Positive in his right hand was—that and the fact his picture had been in the morning paper.

"You the owner of this place, Pop?" he asked.

"I am," I said, and let it go at that.

He spotted the coffee pot steaming on my hot plate. "Pour me a cup of that," he said. "I'm a customer, Pop, and you want to make me comfortable, don't you? If you're smart you do."

I poured him a thick china mug of the hot coffee. He set down the bag and took the mug with his left hand. "I'm not open for business," I said. "The planes took storm damage. They've got to be checked over before I can fly."

He drank some of the coffee with appreciation before answering. "No soap, Pop," he said then. "I got a car radio and I talked to folks in town. All you had here was rain. Besides, they tell me you're a real hotshot flyer—stunts, crop duster, ex-army, the works. Fella at the gas station said you could fly a paper plane down a twister's gut. You wouldn't make a liar out of him now?"

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"Exactly what is it you want?"

"Nothing very hard," he said. "I want you to fly me across the border to a place I'll show you. When we get there I'll jump—there's no place to land a plane—and you fly on home. Very simple. Get it?"

"I don't run a charter service."

Strictly speaking it was true enough. The little hangar and country landing strip I'd bought with a lifetime's savings (such as they were) were headquarters for local private planes. I had a class of teen-agers from the little towns and big ranches whom I was teaching to fly. The county Sky Divers Club kept their gear here. So did a couple of crop dusters. Of course, once in a while I'd fly a friend in or out in an emergency, but that was all the charter business I did.

"You'll fly me, Pop," he said. The gun gave his words authority.

"You'll have to wait till morning then," I said. "On a night like this you couldn't even see where the ground is."

"Tonight," he said. "Now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you recognize me, Pop. If you do, somebody else may have. I got a radio. I know that bank teller died. I know the river's flooded and the only way I can cross the border is by plane. How come you recognize me, old man? I changed my looks."

He was smart. I didn't try to bluff him. With his kind it's safer not to. "Sure. You took off the glasses and the mustache and you changed clothes. But that bank had one of them new hidden cameras. The picture's not very good, but it's in the papers and on TV. The gun and the bag helped me too."

"Okay," he said. "I figured about as much. Now you know why you're gonna fly. You just do like I say, and don't worry about seeing the ground. I got friends waiting. There'll be a signal for me. Now let's get going. I don't want to be here when your friends show up."

"You ever jumped?" I asked.

"I seen it in the movies," he said. "Don't worry, Pop. All I've got to do is pull the little ring. Now hurry up. Anybody comes, I got nothing at all to lose if I knock you off first. Just think about that."

I thought about it. I also thought about the dead bank teller. The paper said he had a wife and kids. "I don't suppose you'd just put the gun down and give yourself up? You'll get it in the end one way or the other."

"Ha," he said. "You're slipping your gears, Pop."

Well, I'd given him the chance. I led him out into the rear of the hangar where the gear lockers were against the wall back of the two long tables where chutes were folded. I opened the locker which held the gear belonging to the teen-agers' class. The chutes were full-sized and in the packs. They'd had their first lesson in folding just two days before the storm hit.

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I pulled a pack at random and handed it to him.

He looked at it. "You sure this thing's okay?"

"I'm sure enough so I'll wear it myself," I said, beginning to put it on. "Pick one for yourself."

He must have hefted half a dozen packs before he found one that suited him.

We went out to my two-seater private job. He made me show him which was the *Send* switch on the radio and he set it at *Off*. He also kept the gun in his hand and the suitcase between his knees. Once we took off he made me get up into the cloud cover and fly by instruments until we crossed the border and were over Mexico. I figured the folks on the ground were too busy with the flood to notice us anyway.

Then we came down under the high ceiling. He sighted the lights of San Pablo far below and told me to pick up and follow the main road west. It was hard to spot the road, but once in a while there were car headlights moving, and we homed on those.

"Suppose I decided to turn you in?" I said finally. "What's to stop me from circling back to San Pablo strip? The Mexican cops would take care of you there."

"That ain't such a good idea, Pop. I asked you once: what do I lose if I gun you?"

"Can you fly, buster?"

"No. But don't let that give you ideas. I can jump, whether you're alive or not." He was positive.

"Well," I thought to myself. "That's the second time I gave you your chance."

About twenty miles out of town I saw his signal even before he did. Close to the road somebody had lit three fires to make a triangle.

"That's it," he said. "Just circle real slow, Pop, and make sure I jump where the wind will take me close to those fires."

He got the door slid back and prepared to jump. From the way he looked I was pretty sure he meant to put a couple of slugs into me at the last minute. That way I couldn't use my radio or land at San Pablo and put the rurales on his tail. But I didn't give him the chance. Just as I saw him get set I shoved the stick hard. He lost his balance and flipped out.

I watched as closely as I could for the chute to open. The white silk would have picked up enough light to show. It never did open—or if it did, it must have tangled or candled almost instantly. I've yet to see a teen-ager pack a chute properly on his first lesson. That's why my second lesson is always to unpack every chute and point out the mistakes the kids have made.

I wondered if he had time to think on the way down. He might have remembered I'd given him two chances to turn himself in. I always was soft-hearted.

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a *NEW* long novelet by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

In 1845 Sir James Graham, Commissioner of Scotland Yard, detailed twelve police officers for exclusive plainclothes detective work. These twelve detectives were the embryo of London's famous C.I.D. (created officially in 1876). The first writer usually credited with recognizing the importance of Sir James Graham's revolutionary step was the great Charles Dickens.

In 1850, only five years after the birth of this plainclothes division, Charles Dickens wrote four articles describing the detectives' work; each article contained illustrative cases, and these constituted what might be called the first procedural detective stories. The articles appeared in four 1850 issues of "Household Words" (a magazine which Dickens was then editing)—issues of July 13, July 27, August 10, and September 14; one of these detective "anecdotes," titled "The Pair of Gloves," was published in EQMM's 26th Anniversary Issue (March 1967).

Now that, briefly, is the historical background of Avram Davidson's new long novelet, "The Importance of Trifles," about Jacob Hays, High Constable of New York City in the 1840's. Note that this is precisely the time Sir James Graham inaugurated London's detective force, and just before Charles Dickens recorded its exploits in print. The conclusion is inescapable: Avram Davidson deliberately set out to write a Dickensian real-life detective tale, placing the action in New York instead of London. The result is a tour de force (pun intended)—an historical detective story with all the flavor and gusto of Dickens' magazine articles, a "period piece" of remarkable verisimilitude and authenticity of detail—the sights, smells, sounds, the very taste and "feel" of New York City, its crime problems and its detective techniques of more than a century ago . . .

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIFLES

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

JACOB HAYS, HIGH CONSTABLE OF the City of New-York, had eaten his usual breakfast of fried eggs and beefsteak, broiled fish (shad, this time), a heap of pan-cakes, a pair of chickens' wings, hot buttered rolls and tea. More and more people were drinking coffee, as the nineteenth Century rolled into its fourth decade, but Jacob Hays still imbibed hyson rather than java.

"Promise me, Mr. Hays," his wife demanded, as he rose to leave, "that if it commences rain you'll take the Broad-way caravan."

"Mrs. Hays, good morning," said her husband briefly. And walked out of the house with brisk strides.

The day was dark, but it would be darker than it had ever been before he would spend eight cents to ride a mile. Many a mickle makes a muckle, his mother used to say; and his father's advice had been: Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of you. Besides, did it befit the holder of his office to cram into a crowded caravan like a commission-merchant or a law-clerk? Would the people not think he was doddering if they saw him in an omnibus? He, who patrolled the city afoot by day and by night? Just so.

Presumably, it had been a quiet night, for no message had come to pull him out from his featherbed. No riots or major fires—a mercy.

It had been twenty-six years since old Governor De Witt Clinton, then Mayor of New-York, had appointed him High Constable, and in all that time the City had never ceased to grow—nor had crime ever ceased to keep pace with commerce and culture. Jacob Hays had come to relish quiet nights, though scarcely even one of these passed in which he did not awaken, straining his ears for some sound —near or far—betokening a conflagration in South-street or a murderous "hooley" in the Five-Points. And yet there were citizens who still expected him to undertake the functions of a hog-warden!

The very thought of it made him snort. He looked around challengingly—then smiled. There was no trouble in the Broad-way at this time of morning, or, indeed, at any other time of day. The wide, clean street, lined with fashionable hotels and shops and busy office buildings, stretched along for almost three miles, the wonder of the country—proud New-Yorkers said, of the world. And all along it, from the Battery to Twentieth-street, looked upon from wooden

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shacks and towering five-storey brick buildings alike, a press of carts, drays, wagons, carriages, cabs, and omnibuses filled the eighty-foot width of the road with a ceaseless rumbling.

"Good-morning, High Constable," said a dry-goods merchant, setting out open boxes of new percales and nankeens for passers-by to examine at pleasure. "Good-morning, Mr. Hays," said an admiralty-lawyer, on his way to visit the forest of masts along the lower East-River. "Good-morning, Jacob," said old Alderman Ter Williger.

And two young bloods, of the sort which had begun to infest the Bowery-road, hats cocked as sharply over carefully-soaped locks of hair as gravity would allow, nudged one the other sharply, and hissed, "Old Hays!"

Their expression, as they met his cold, knowledgeable eye, changed from one of studied insolence to a mixture of uneasiness and would-be defiance. He gave his high-constabular staff, which he always carried with him, a slight shake in their direction, and they lowered their gaze and slunk by. No, they were just strutting, and would make no trouble in the Broad-way.

The unpaven, narrow, pig-ridden and stinking side-streets of the lower city, ill-lit and under-patrolled (but try to obtain additional money for more constables from the Board of Aldermen!)—these were the places they would choose for crime. And it was in the Bowery, with its popular theatres and pleasure gardens, that they would seek their amusement: jostling citizens, insulting ladies, and causing commotions in general.

Once in his office Hays ignored the view of the City Hall Park, and dealt rapidly with that portion of the day's new business which responded to rapid treatment. Then he looked over his correspondence—runaway daughters and fugitive sons; complaints of bogus lotteries and similar frauds which seemed to go on forever—like "The Spanish Prisoner" swindle, the "English-Estate-in-Chancery-to-which-you-are-heir" swindle.

"Any new 'cards'?" he asked his assistant. There were—there always were. Bank robbery in Portland, green-goods merchant hastily departed from Philadelphia, murder in Albany, funds embezzled from London, cargo of rum stolen in Boston, shipment of cotton made off with in Georgia, eleven absconded apprentices, two fugitive slaves, piracy in the Gulph of Mexico.

"Post those with descriptions," he directed. "What's next?"

"Next" was a young Colored man whose bright red shirt, wide-bottomed trousers, and glazed hat—the last held respectfully in his hands—told Hays of the man's profession before he even looked at the paper held out to him.

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WHEREAS, an ACT of the CONGRESS of the Year 1818, intituled *AN ACT TO DEFINE AND PROTECT THE STATUS OF SEAMEN* [Hays read], does not mention the Status of Seamen who are Persons of Color, and WHEREAS, the *Legislature* of the *STATE OF NEW-YORK* in the Year 1820 has authorized the Certification of Seamen domiciled or denizened in the State of New-York who are Free Persons of Color, now, THEREFORE, be it known that I, *Jefferson Van Der Wett,* a Clerk of the CITY OF NEW-YORK, do hereby certify that the bearer, *Lucas Oaks,* a Seaman of this City, and a Man of Color, is known to me on good evidence to be a FREE MAN, and I do further Enjoin all Men of whatsoever Cities, States, Territories, and Nations, to recognize him in such Status and not to Hold, Use, nor Dispose of him, the aforesaid *Lucas Oaks,* a FREE MAN of Color, as if he were not in Fact *FREE.*

"Anything against him?" Hays asked. The Constable shook his head. Hays dipped his quill, wrote *No Criminal Record. J. Hays. High Constable, C. of N-Y.,* scattered sand, and handed it to the Negro who departed with thanks.

And so the day proceeded. The Five-Points—that foul and teeming human rookery where Cross, Anthony, Littlewater, Orange, and Mulberry meet—had had its usual murder. The usual sailor had been found dead by violence. This time the almost nightly occurrence was not the same, though often enough it was a sailor found dead in the Five-Points; often in its black and filthy heart—the swarming, putrefying tenement called the Old Brewery.

There was little chance of discovering the killers at the moment, if ever. The night had witnessed their deeds, and as little as the night would testify, so little would the furtive inhabitants of the criminal world testify. Until and unless, of course, the cut-throats had a falling out. In which case there might be a dirty, illiterate note some morning on Hays's desk—a whisper in the ear of the Watch (as the Constabulary was also called)—notes and whispers which might lead to arrest or conviction. Or might not.

It sometimes seemed to Jacob Hays that the work-houses, paupers' wards, and felon-cells of all the world, European as well as American, were pouring their wretched contents into New-York; although he knew well enough that most of the ever-increasing stream of immigrants were good people. It would ill behoove him to rail against "foreigners," as some were doing. Had not his own mother been born abroad? And his father's parents? When you came down to it, whose stock *was* entirely "Native American"?—except for the

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Indians. And there were those who claimed (Hays recalled a recent sermon at Scotch Presbyterian Church) that the Indians themselves were none other than the Lost Tribes of Israel!

It was Hays's custom, if the affairs of the morning permitted, to take some light refreshment about ten o'clock, and then to read through all the newspapers. That is, not to read every word, but to have a look at the items marked for him by his assistant, Constable Moore, who had standing instructions to check off any bit of news referring to crime or the police. It was always amusing—sometimes instructive—to observe the way in which the same incident was treated in different newspapers, and to see how they agreed (or, more often, disagreed) with the official report of the same incident.

In the staid *Commercial Gazette* of this morning, for example, there was the single line: *The body of a man, as yet unidentified, was found yesterday in Dunstan-Slip.* That was all. *A man.* Not, Hays noted, *a gentleman.* In the lives or deaths of the lower orders of society the *Commercial Gazette* was supremely uninterested.

The *News-Letter* had this to say: *Yesterday afternoon the body of a man was discerned floating in the River at Dunstan-Slip by a woman of the neighborhood. The dead person, who, by his dress, was evidently a member of the sea-faring class, had not long been exposed to the briny element, and appeared to be in his middle years. It is opined that he came to his death by natural causes. His name has not yet been learned.*

The recently-established *True Citizen and Temperance Advocate,* however, had learned—or said it had learned—his name. *An intelligent and respectable female identified the remains to this journal as that of one Gorman or Gormby, a sailingman, much given to the prevalent vice of his class (though not only of his class) vide licet, imbibing large quantities of alcoholic liquors—we do not denominate them 'beverages'. Whilst in a condition of intoxication, the dead man, we adduce, fell into the Slip and drowned. Within four blocks of the fatal scene our reporter counted no less than thirty-nine dram-stores, grog-shops, gin-mills, brandy-houses, and so-called "grocery" establishments, these last entirely devoted to purveying raw spirits to the ignorant. When will a supine administration awaken to the menace, et cetera, et cetera.*

And the *Register* devoted a full column to what it called a *dastardly crime, undoubtedly committed by a gang of crimps, bent on conveying the innocent seaman against his will to the cruel mercies of a conscienceless master-mariner bound for foreign ports where the writ of the American Republic runs not. It was doubtless owing to his*

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reluctance to be forced into a berth he did not desire that the unfortunate Jack-Tar resisted so vigorously that his kidnappers decided on his Death. He was tossed into the brackish waters of Dunstan-Slip where, being like the generality of sea-farers, unable to swim, he expired by drowning.

Old Hays snorted. "Catch any crimps tossing twenty dollars worth of two-footed merchandise away! Those they don't dope, they bash—but, one way or another, they get them aboard alive. Any wounds on him, Neddy?"

"Few bruises, Mr. High—but no wounds," said Constable Edward Moore. "Course he wasn't no Gorman nor Gormby, any more than he was crimped." His tone of voice indicated that he realized he was not telling his superior anything the latter didn't know.

Hays nodded, picked up the official constabulary report, mumbled the words to himself, adding his own comments. "Bruises on breast, abdomen, and face; also, back of neck. Couldn't have gotten them all by falling down: been fighting. Clothes worn and dirty—been on shore a long time. Not known to the Watch or any of our waterfront friends—didn't ship out of the port of New-York. Shoes show signs of recent hard use—walked from his last port."

"Wasn't killed for his fortune, we may be sure," said Moore.

"The Coroner's inquisition?"

"Dead before he hit the water, seems like. Neck broke. Lungs dry. Hardly swollen, scarcely a mark on him from fish or crabs." Hays thought about his breakfast shad, but he had a strong stomach (twenty-six years as High Constable!) and didn't think about it long. "He was found in mid-afternoon, and conjecture is that he'd been dead since the night before. Woman emptying a slop-bucket spied him."

The two men mused on this unusual fastidiousness in a district where slops were emptied, usually, out the nearest window. Then Moore continued: "Noteworthy features? Had a great swelling of the left ear-lobe. Forget what you call it. Key-something."

But Hays remembered. "A keloid. Scarred over and swelled when he had it pierced for an earring, I expect. Sometimes happens so. We'd know he was a sailor from that alone. Potter's Field?" Constable Moore nodded.

Hays started to put the report down, then sensed, rather than saw, that his assistant had something else to tell him; and waited.

"He had this in his mouth." The Constable held out a screw of paper, unwrapped it. Inside lay a piece of fibre, yellowish-brown in color. "Cotton—raw cotton. A trifle, but I thought I'd save it for you. What do you think?"

Hays shook his head. "No idea. But glad you kept it. File it with the report. What's next?"

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"Lady robbed of a diamond heirloom ring wants to see you about it, personal. Englishman with letter of introduction from Lord Mayor of London. Three candidates for the Watch. Man from Eagle Hotel with information about the gang of baggage-thieves. A—"

The High Constable raised his hand. "That'll do for the while. Lady first." . . .

Two nights later there was a wild fight involving the crews of three ships moored in South-street. The Night Constable-in-charge was new to the post and, not trusting to his own ability to discriminate between riots major and minor, sent for Hays. He came quickly enough, though the brawl was over by then; most of the men had either stumbled aboard their vessels or staggered away for further entertainment. The few who insisted upon continuing the affair had been hauled off to the Watch-house to meditate on their sins. And several of the spectators vanished the instant they saw the High Constable's well-known figure come in sight.

But by that time something else had developed.

"Hold up your lanterns," Hays directed his men. "The gas-light from the street is so dim I—that's better. Ah, me. More sailors must die ashore than at sea, I think."

The alley was wide enough to accommodate only two men, and one of these was dead. Hays patted the pockets of the pea-coat, was rewarded with a jingle, and thrust a hand inside. "Thirty cents."

For thirty cents a man could eat well and drink himself into a stupor and still have enough left for a night's lodging if he was sober enough to want more than the floor of the city to sleep on. Men were killed for much less than thirty cents. Therefore—

Word had gotten around, and a knot of night-crawlers, still excited from the fight, crowded into the alley, pressing and craning for a glimpse. Hays rose and looked at them; at once several caps were pulled low and faces sunk into collars. He held out his staff. "Clear the alley, citizens. Just so. Constables, take the body out. Has a cart been summoned? Lay him down here. No, don't cover his face. I want him identified, if possible."

It proved easily possible. The dead man was identified before his coat touched the sidewalk. "Tim Scott. Everyone knew Tim Scott. Poor Tim. Poor Tim's a-cold." (This last from a gentleman later identified as a play-actor at the Park Theatre.) "Spent his money like a gentleman. Who saw him last alive? Well . . ." A reluctance to be identified in this capacity was at once apparent.

But other information continued to come forth. "Not so long ago Tim bought wine for everyone at Niblo's Gardens. And segars. Yes, segars, too, for all the gentlemen. Did this more than once a night,

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and for more than a few nights, too . . . Enemies? Not a one in the world."

"I suppose his friends killed him, then?" Silence again. Cart-wheels rattled, and the crowd, gathered from all the dram-cellars whose yellow lights beckoned dimly through dirty window-panes, parted. As the body was lifted into the cart Hays removed his hat, and—one by one—reluctance evidently springing not so much from contumacy as from ignorance that this little gesture was customary or expected—one by one the greasy hats and dirty caps came off. Then the cart clattered away again. The crowd, still eager for excitement, stirred restlessly.

"All good citizens," said Hays, "will now go home." He did not expect the suggestion to be taken literally. If "home" was a lumpy, dirty pallet on a filthy floor it naturally had no appeal to match that of a brandy-shop or an oyster-stall, where some of the "good citizens" were even now heading to satisfy newly-awakened or previously-ungratified appetites; even if "home" was the streets, the mud, filth, and dim lights were no deterrents—there was nothing better at home. In the streets there were at least company and excitement. But the crowd dissolved, and this was all Hays had hoped for.

The next day Hays paid a further visit to Tim Scott, now naked on scrubbed pine-boards. Constables Breakstone and Onderdonk accompanied him. Both young Watch-officers had taken to heart Hays's almost constant insistence on the importance of "trifles", which was more than could be said for most of the Watch, to whom a crime was insoluable if not accompanied by a knife with the knifer's name burned in the hilt.

"How much would it take to treat the house at Niblo's to wine and segars several times a night, several nights running?" Hays asked, looking at the dead man's face. The death pallor could not dispel entirely the tokens of sun and wind.

"More than a sailingman would be likely to make on a coasting voyage," Constable Breakstone said. He was the son of a ship-chandler, had grown up along the water-front, and knew its ways. At Hays's look of inquiry he continued, "Tim had said his last trip was on a coaster, but he didn't say where to. Besides, he hadn't been gone long enough for an overseas voyage. But that money in his pocket, sir, it wasn't the last of what he'd had."

"You mean there's more somewheres?"

"No, sir. I mean that he'd spent it all some time ago. He'd been cadging off the lads since then. Then the other day he said he was going to get some more. He turned up at Barney Boots's gin-parlor last night with a dollar, and the thirty cents was the last of that. And he

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was heard to say that this was just the beginning—that he was going to get more very soon. I asked did he have a particular friend, and it seems he did—Billy Walters. Some think they'd sailed together on this last trip. But no one has seen Billy lately. And that's all I know, sir."

Hays nodded. "That's a good bit to go on. Meanwhile—" He lowered the sheet. "Just so. I thought these would show up better today." On the dead man's muscular throat were two sets of small and ugly marks. "Strangled, you see. And strangled from behind, too. Either someone crept up on him unbeknownst, or he knew the man behind him and wasn't expecting violence. Mr. Breakstone, hold the body up. Now you, Mr. Onderdonk, stand behind him. Let's have your hands. Big ones, a wide spread—just like these. Let your fingers rest where I place them."

One by one he placed the young man's fingers so that each rested on one of the finger marks, or as near to it as possible. Leaving them so, he peered at the skin of the dead man's back. "Just so. Jabbed up his knee, used it as a lever, grabbed the throat, and squeezed. Tim Scott was a strong man. This fellow was stronger. Had finicking ways, though. All right, let him down."

Breakstone covered the face. "'Finicking ways', Mr. High?"

"Yes," said Hays thoughtfully. "Let the little finger of his left hand stick out whilst he was doing his evil work Like he was drinking a dish of tea. Mr. Breakstone—"

"Sir?"

"You might see that the word is passed among those who enjoyed the late Tim Scott's hospitality at Niblo's—and those who enjoyed his business anywhere else, like Barney Boots, for instance—that it would be the mark of a good citizen and a good Christian to contribute for funeral expenses."

"I'll do that."

"Let it be known," said Jacob Hays reflectively, "that I particularly favor such contributions. Yes. Just so."

Crime never sleeps, but it is no coincidence that in warmer weather it is more restless than commonly. As the shad run dropped off and Spring, on its way into Summer, continued to crowd the trees with green, the residents of those districts in which few trees grew seemed more and more to fall into those lawless ways from which they had taken a partial vacation during the Winter months. Which often proved unfortunate for visitors to those districts. Mrs. Jacob Hays, however, was unsympathetic.

"Do not tell me, Mr. Hays," she said, "that you intend to spend the greater part of yet another night on patrol." Her husband, as if obedience itself, did not tell her that, nor anything else—but addressed himself to his supper. "I cannot believe," she continued presently, "that these people who get them-

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selves into trouble are truly innocent of improper intention. What is a respectable person *doing* in the Five-Points? Tell me *that,* if you please, Mr. Hays."

Evidently he did not please, for he said, "Mrs. Hays, good-evening," rose, and departed. He had doubled the patrol in the Five-Points these nights, and that meant taking men away from other places. Wall-street and South-street would howl; well, let them. Or, rather, let them come out in favor of higher taxes to pay for the extra protection the city needed. Let them pave the streets, too, while they were at it; and put up more gas-lamps. Let them—

He stopped. There was some one very near at hand, some one who did not wish to be seen, some one in the pool of darkness which was the space between two buildings at his left. "I know you are there," said Jacob Hays.

And from the darkness a low voice said, "There is a body in the Old Brewery."

"There usually is. What floor?"

"Second."

"Just so. What else?" But there was nothing else. His ears had heard no sound of departure, but he knew that whoever it was had gone. And he walked faster.

On Anthony-street he found Constables Breakstone and Onderdonk, gestured them with his staff to follow him. As he approached the looming hulk of the Old Brewery, the neighborhood was in its usual uproar—screams, shouts, obscenities, drunken songs, the raucous cries which would go on almost till dawn, and then begin again almost at once. Then—from somewhere—not in a shout or scream, not in any tone of hate, but with a sharp note of warning—"Old Hays!"—and silence fell.

That is, comparative silence: quiet enough to hear his own and his men's feet on the muddy sidewalk and then, as they entered the building, on the rotten wood of the floor, or, rather, on the accumulated filth of years which lay inches thick over the rotten wood except where the flooring had given way and left ugly, dangerous holes.

"Turn up your lamps," he directed. It was small enough light they gave at best, though enough to keep them from breaking a leg. It was a wonder that the tiny lamps burned at all in here, the air was so foul. There was no railing on the sloping stairs, but still the three men gave the walls a wide enough berth, alive and rippling with vermin as they were.

And all the time there was a murmuring, a muttering, a whispering, a hissing from the darkness. Doors were ajar and dim lights shone and bodies slunk past, but no faces were seen. Rat's claws scrabbled. The stench grew more fearful, more noisome. Doors closed softly as they approached, opened after they passed. But the

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door at the end of the first corridor did not move, and behind it Hays found what he had come for.

The dead man was sprawled in a chair at the table, head backwards and upwards. A bottle had been spilled recently—the sharp odor of "brandy" (as the raw, white whiskey was called) filled the room and the liquor itself was still damp; but of the bottle there was no trace. Gift horses were seldom looked long in the mouth at the Old Brewery. The dead man's face was bruised, and blood welled from his nose and from a cut over one eye, an eye which stared in fierce amazement at the shadowy ceiling.

In his ribs on the left side a knife had been driven. It was still there.

They examined the floor carefully, but nothing was there except blood and dirt. In one corner was a foul-looking bed whose greasy rags yielded nothing. A cracked water-jug. An empty ditty-bag. And that was all.

As Hays ended his scrutiny of the room he saw that young Breakstone was intently looking at the dead man's face. The Constable caught his eye, and nodded. "I've seen him before, sir. He came into my father's place a few times, on and off, when his ships were in port, to sell his adventures. But I can't put my mind on his name or his ships! Maybe they will come to me, by and by."

"Any big adventures?"

Breakstone shook his head. "I don't think so. A chest of tea. A few sacks of coffee or wool. A barrel of sugar or molasses. That sort of thing. Once, I think, he had a bale of cotton—that was the biggest."

"Ah, well. Let me hold the lanterns while you get a grip on him. I'll go ahead and light your way. Mind your—" He stopped and bent over just as they passed through the door. Something was on the floor. He picked it up, stuffed it in his pocket, and straightened. "Mind your step. Careful, now."

Slowly and gingerly they made their way down the corridor, down the stairs, and out to the street. And all the while, moved by invisible hands, doors closed as they approached and opened after they passed, and all the while there was a murmuring, a muttering, a whispering, a hissing from the fetid darkness, and the scrabbling of rats in the walls.

Of course Hays found out nothing when, the body having been carted away, he returned to question the inhabitants—particularly those in rooms adjoining the one in which the dead man was found. No one had seen any thing, heard any thing; no one knew any thing, or suspected any thing. By the time he had finished, his head was reeling from the foul air, and the street seemed deliciously cool and fresh in comparison.

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As Hays and his men left the Five-Points they heard the unexpected quiet broken by what seemed like a howl from hundreds of throats—a howl of defiance, execration, an utterly evil triumph.

Breakstone half-turned, but his superior's hand kept him steady. "The water-front is no sabbath-school," Breakstone said. "But it was never like that. At least you have the clean winds from the harbor, and the people give you a smile and a laugh and mostly folks try to keep themselves a bit decent in some ways, anyway. But those in the Old Brewery now—what makes them like that?"

They walked on in silence. Then Hays said, "I don't know, Mr. Breakstone. There's a whole green continent before them, wide-open under the sweet air of Heaven. But they choose to dwell in the dark and the mire. Why are they like that? As well ask the mole and the mudfish, I suppose."

It was past mid-night when he reached home. And next day there was no time for speculation on social philosophy. The baggage-gang had extended their depredations, and complaints of thefts poured in from the docks around Jay-street, where Hudson-River boats put in, and from the Battery, whence the ferries plied to Jersey, Staten-Island, Brooklyn, and from the great packet-ships in the Upper Harbor. From mere sneak-thieves the ring had advanced to a pretense of being regular baggage-porters and hotel-runners. A genuine rustic, parted from his old cow-hide trunk, was apt to set up an immediate clamor—in which case there was a chance, though a slim one, of its recovery. But a visitor from a small town, with just enough polish to desire not to be known for what he was, would delay out of embarrassment; in which case there was usually no hope for his luggage.

The problems of taking men from elsewhere to patrol the docks, of uncovering information about who was "fencing" (and where), in addition to routine duties of a sort which could neither be postponed nor delegated, kept Hays from seeing Constable Breakstone until late in the afternoon.

"Try as I would," the young man said, "I couldn't remember that sailor's name. So I looked up old Poppie Vanderclooster, who used to help Father in the shop at one time, and took him along to the dead-house. And he knew the face at once. Henry Roberts. They called him Roaring Roberts; he had a big, booming voice. I've asked around, and it seems he'd turned to the bad of late years. Some of the adventures he sold weren't his to sell. He had a lot of money not so long ago, and was throwing it around like a drunken sailor—which, of course, is just what he was. I guess he must have spent it all, or else what would he

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have been doing in that hole of the Old Brewery?"

The two of them were on their way back to the dead-house. Hays gave an exclamation, and began patting his pockets. "Ah, here it is," he said. "I found it just outside the door of the room, last night, there in the Five-Points. What do you make of it? Not the sort of thing generally worn in the Old Brewery, is it?"

"A gentleman's glove? No—and not the sort of thing Roaring Roberts would've worn, generally, either. Though he might, when he was spending all that money, have bought himself a pair."

"Just so. Well, we'll see."

White-haired old Whitby, the dead-house keeper, surveyed them reproachfully through red-rimmed eyes as they came over to Roberts' body. "You're late," he said. "The inquisition's been over for hours. We're about set to coffin him. Coroner's jury reached the verdict that Deceased had come to his death through haemorrhage caused by forcible entry of a knife, length of the blade four and one-half inches, between the fourth and fifth ribs, thus occasioning the severance of veins and arteries—"

"All right, Whit, we know that—hold up your left hand, Constable." The glove slipped on easily enough; if anything, it was a size too large. "It might be his," said Hays reflectively. "Then again, it might not have anything to do with the matter. I did find it outside the room."

As he slipped the glove off, something fell to the floor. Old Whitby bent down and picked it up.

"Flax? Wool?" he asked, rolling the fibre between his fingers.

"Give it here, Whit," Hays said shortly. At the door he stopped, handed the glove to Breakstone. "Check all the haberdashers," he said. "See what you can find."

Alderman Nicholas Ter Williger had his counting-house in the same building as his ware-house. Once, when business was smaller and Ter Williger (not yet an alderman) younger, he and his family had lived up stairs. But that old Knickerbocker fashion was going out of style nowadays. Besides, his children—and some of his grand-children—had their own establishments, and Mrs. Ter Williger was dead.

The clerks looked at Hays from their high stools with unabashed astonishment, but his cold gray eyes stared them back to their ledgers. He stalked through the counthouse to the office in the back where, as expected, he found the proprietor.

"Hello, Jacob," said Ter Williger. "It's been too long. I meant to stop and say a few words the other morning, but you seemed preoccupied with deep thoughts. Mrs. Hays is well, I trust?"

"Quite well."

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"Capital. Convey my respects. And now. I have a piece of nice, clean Saugerties ice here and I was about to compound a sherry-cobbler. I shall compound two."

"'Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and for thine often infirmities', eh, Nick?"

The old gentleman cut lemons, broke off pieces of sugar-loaf. "Exactly. You may worship Scotch Presbyterian instead of Dutch Reformed, but you're a fellow-Calvinist and know that 'Man born of woman is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards,' and hence predestined to a multitude of 'often infirmities,' for some of which—my long years have taught me—sherry-cobbler is a sovereign remedy." He nodded, pounded ice.

The drink was cool and gratifying. It was quiet in the office, with its dark walls, from which engravings of President and Lady Washington looked down with stern benignancy. After a long moment Nicholas Ter Williger sighed. "I know you and your Caledonian conscience too well, Jacob," he said, "to believe it would allow you to pay a purely social call in the daytime. What aspect of rogue-catching brings you to the office of a respectable, if almost super-annuated, cotton-broker?"

"Cotton brings me here," said Hays. He produced two tiny paper packets, unfolded them, pushed them across the desk. At once Ter Williger's hooded eyes grew sharp. "Nankeen," he said instantly. Then he took up the pieces, pulled the fibres, compared them. "Same crop, too, I'd say. Good quality Nankeen . . . Where does it grow? Well, China, originally. Nankeen or Nanking, that's a city over there. But we grow it here in our own South nowadays, more than enough for own uses. 'Slave cotton', they call it, too, sometimes."

Hays considered. Then, "What do you mean, 'slave cotton'? Isn't most cotton grown by slaves?"

Ter Williger nodded. "Yes, but—well, here's how it works, Jacob. Some of the plantations allow their people to grow a little cotton on their own, after quitting time in the big fields, and when this cotton is sold the people get to keep the money. They use it, oh, say, to buy some relish to add to their victuals—salt-fish, maybe, as a change from pork and corn-meal—or perhaps a piece of bright cloth for a shirt or a dress. Maybe some trumpery jewelry. Well, just to keep temptation out of their way, because, being property himself, the slave doesn't have much sense of property—here, let me show you."

From the shelf behind him Ter Williger took some sample lengths of fibre. "This is what we call Sea-Island. And this is Uplands. See how much different they are in color from Nankeen? How much lighter, whiter? No slave would be foolish enough to steal some of his master's cotton and try and mix it

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with his own yellow Nankeen. I don't deal in it myself. Jenkins does, but he's not here now."

Something stirred in Hays's mind. "I had a card not so long ago—large quantity of cotton stolen from Georgia, somewheres."

Ter Williger nodded rapidly. "Yes, I know about that. But that was Sea-Island, not Nankeen. Planter named Remington was holding back quite some bales, hoping for a rise in the market. St. Simon's-Island. Cotton was already balled and in a shed by the wharf. Came morning they found the Negro watchman dead and the bales gone. Sea-Island, you know, fetches top price. Not Nankeen, though." He took up his glass, but it was empty, and he set it down again, regretfully.

Hays rose. "Then Nankeen doesn't grow in any one particular locality?"

The older man pursued his mouth. Then he said, "I tell you what. Why not ask Jenkins? He'd be able to give you better answers. . . . Who's he? Well, not exactly a partner. An associate. We have an understanding, and he uses my premises, too. An up-and-coming young man. Pushes a bit more than I care to. When you get old—matter of fact, Jacob, why don't you come along with me and talk to him? I'm going to his boarding-house now. A dicty place near Greenwich-Village."

Ter Williger reached for his hat, chuckled. "Matter of fact, I live there myself. Jeremiah Gale keeps it, with his wife. She orders the help around and he plays whist with the guests. A well-spread table, and a brightly-furnished house. Just the thing for old moss-backs like me—*and* for young couples like the Jenkinses. House property is high, and so are house-rents and servants' wages. Time enough for them to set up for themselves when they have a few children."

In a few minutes they were sitting in a cab and old Ter Williger rambled on about the fashion for boarding-house living, the prices of butcher's meat, game, fish, wine, clothing; and how much cheaper every thing had been twenty, thirty-five, and fifty years ago.

"Nicholas, I need more men," Hays said presently. "I can't even keep up with crime with my present force, let alone keep ahead of it. I need more men, and the Board of Aldermen has got to give me the money to pay for them."

The City had cooled off as late afternoon faded into early evening. The cab rolled along between rows of neat brick houses, freshly-painted red, with trim white lines drawn to simulate mortar. Green-clad tree branches arched over the street. There was not a pig in sight. It was quite a change from the hustle of the Broad-way, or the squalor of the Five-Points.

Nicholas Ter Williger sighed. "What can *I* do, Jacob? I'm just an

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old Federalist who's hung on past his time, and they all know it down at City Hall. I shall not run again, and they all know that, too. It's a Tammany-man you should be talking to about this. Am I right?"

He tipped his hat to a passing lady, and Hays followed suit. "Yes," the High Constable agreed, "but if I talk to a Tammany-man about needing more men, he'll smile like a bucketful of chips, say he agrees with me completely, and knows just the men. Two of them will be his nephews, three of them will be his cousins, and the rest of them will be broken-down oystermen or some thing of that sort, unfit for any sort of work, but all from his ward, and all deserving Democrats. Damnation, Nick, I like to hire my own men! I—oh, are we here now? Just so."

Jeremiah Gale's establishment for paying guests was undistinguishable, with its scrubbed-white stoop and its bright green shutters, from any of the other houses in the row. A neatly-dressed Irish maid opened the door to them. Her manner was staid and respectful, but there was a look in her eye which convinced Hays that she would not always be content to take gentlemen's hats, to say, "Yes, sir," and 'Yes, ma'm," to haul firewood, coal, and hot water up three and four flights of stairs, and to toil fourteen hours a day for the $5 a month which was the most she could hope for. Servants did not stay servants long—at least, not in New York.

The house of Jeremiah Gale was richly, almost sumptuously furnished. Silken draperies, satin-upholstered furniture, mahogany, rosewood, marble, and gilt were everywhere. Jeremiah Gale himself came forward to greet them, a short and rosy gentleman of full habit, in claret-colored coat, pepper-and-salt trousers, and white silk stockings contrasting with the black sheen of his highly-polished shoes. There was a hum of conversation from inside, in which female voices predominated, and some one was playing on the pianoforte.

"Mr. Alderman Ter Williger!" One might have thought it had been last year instead of this morning that they had parted. "I trust I see you well, and not overly fatigued from the duties of the day?" A genteel bow, and then another genteel bow. "Mr. High Constable Hays! Delighted to meet you again!" (To the best of Hays's recollection they had never met before.) "How very happy I am that Mr. Alderman Ter Williger has honored us by bringing you to dinner. You will do us the pleasure of taking dinner, sir? My cook has dressed a pair of turkey-hens with bread-sauce—"

But Hays pleaded his wife's discomfiture, were he to spoil the edge of his appetite for her supper by partaking of Mr. Gale's cook's pair of turkey-hens; and Mr. Gale was

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obliged to smile ruefully, and express a hope amounting to certainty that the High Constable would honor them on another occasion. Then he led them into the parlor.

The pianoforte had ceased, but the lady seated at it was talking busily to another, who had evidently been turning the music for her. She raked the new-comers with a swift glance, but kept on talking.

"Ah, *mais non, mais non!*" she exclaimed. "Two months in England and two weeks in France? *Incroyable! Au contraire*—that is to say, on the contrary; you must revise your plans and spend two months in France and only two weeks in England. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Perfectly, my dear."

"If, indeed, it is absolutely necessary to visit England at all! The land of our fathers it may be, call it the Old Home, but—oh, my dear, so cold, so coarse! That fat old king and his ugly wife! And so unwelcoming to Americans, are they not, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Alas, my dear, we found it so."

"Mais, ooh, la belle France! There you have civilization—fashion—*ton.* We will give you the names of dear friends we visited, Mr. James Jenkins and I, two years ago—people of the finest quality, the most exquisite manners, the epitome of elegance, *mais oui;* and here I see dear Alderman Ter Williger with a distinguished-looking guest. Who can it be?"

And at this point the lady (presumably Mrs. Jenkins) arose from the pianoforte and took what Hays was absolutely certain was her first breath since she had begun speaking.

Mrs. Jenkins was as expensively dressed as it was morally possible for a lady to be, and quite handsome, too. Mr. James Jenkins was a larged-framed man with a red, smooth-shaven, and smiling face. Mrs. Van Dam (the unwise would-be spender of two months in England) was thin and sallow. Mr. Van Dam—a whale-oil commission-merchant—was thinner and sallower. Miss Cadwallader was a boney lady of a certain age and of overpoweringly aristocratic family. Mr. O'Donovan made it known at once that he was from *Northern* Ireland and a Protestant as well. Mr. Blessington was superintendent of an assurance agency and evidently had nothing to say when away from the premises of that essential if unromantic business. And Mrs. Bladen was a widow-woman with a lap-dog and two fat, unmarried daughters.

Such, with the addition of Alderman Ted Williger, were Mr. Jeremiah Gale's paying guests.

In the small sitting-room to which Mr. Gale showed them, Mr. Jenkins listened with the greatest good-nature to Hays's questions. "Nankeen grows over a wide area," he said, "and while there *are* people who'll insist—particularly down

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South—that they can tell from what location a given staple comes, even from which plantation or field, I must regard a claim to such close knowledge as rather—well, pretentious . . . Have I been in the South? Frequently."

The Alderman, who had been listening with some small signs of impatience for the dinner-bell, said now, "Mr. Jenkins made a trip South not long ago to buy Nankeen." The High Constable asked where it had been stored in New-York, and Jenkins said it had not been stored there at all, but had been trans-shipped immediately.

The Liverpool packet-boat was about to sail, he explained, it being the first of the month, the traditional sailing date for packets; and he had heard that the Captain not only had cargo space aboard but was looking for an adventure—the private cargo which all ships' personnel were entitled to take aboard in amounts varying according to rank. The Captain had bought Mr. Jenkins's entire shipment.

The dinner-bell rang, and all three rose. "So there is not, then," Hays inquired, "any way to trace a small amount of this cotton?"

"None that I know of. It comes in to the City all the time, lays on the wharves, and anyone can draw a handful from a bale; samples are pulled in the Exchange and discarded—why, sir, the wind blows it about the streets. Can we trace the wind?"

So much for that, Hays thought, as the cab rolled its way downtown. The two murdered men had been sailors and probably had access to baled cotton, at sea or on shore, a hundred times a year—though why one would put it in his mouth and another in his glove was a question which baffled him completely. Perhaps Breakstone had discovered some thing about the glove itself.

But the Constable hadn't. It was an ordinary gentleman's glove, the haberdashers all said, sold by the dozens and the gross.

Hays sighed, tossed the glove to his desk, and looked at it discontentedly. "I can't believe," he said at last, "that it isn't a clew. Gentleman's gloves in the Old Brewery? No, my boy, it *has* to signify. Of course some one might have stolen a pair—no one would steal just one—but he'd not have carried them all the way back home with him; he'd have sold them for a half-dime to the first fence he came across—yes, and drunk up the half-dime directly, too. I am convinced that this glove was dropped by the man who killed Roberts. In which case it does have some thing to tell me. Perhaps I've not been listening. Hmm."

He picked up the glove and began to examine it carefully, inch by inch, holding it close to his eyes. Suddenly his frown vanished, gave way to a look in which astonishment vied with self-reproach.

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"Ahh!" he exclaimed. "Here's something I hadn't noticed before —and shame upon me, too. Do *you* see it, Mr. Breakstone? No? Fie upon you! Look here."

Hays began to turn the glove inside-out, poking at the fingers with the small end of a pen-holder until they were all reversed. "See it now? Eh?"

Breakstone said, "I see these few wisps of cotton here, sir. But we knew there was cotton in the glove. I still don't see why. Do you?"

But Hays did not answer the question directly. "I want you to set to work on a riddle: What connection is there between Roaring Roberts and Tim Scott? And what connection between those two and the man found dead in Dunstan-Slip? What connections in life?—and in death?"

It was at this moment that the steam-tug *Unicorn* happened to ram the ferry-boat *Governor Tompkins* half-way between New-York and Brooklyn. Twenty passengers were thrown overboard, and only nine picked up from the water alive. Hays was no better with a boat-hook than any one else, but his presence on the river served to discourage the presence of those "volunteers" who were more interested in the contents of water-soaked pockets than in seeing the dead brought ashore for Christian burial.

Five of the missing eleven were found, by and by; and Hays retired from the scene. Experience told him that the rest wouldn't show up for some time.

As Breakstone, himself rather wet about the sleeves and shirt-front, made his way along South-street early that evening, he overheard this point discussed. Some thought the full moon would "draw" the dead to the surface, while others insisted that only the concussion of water-borne cannonry could dislodge them.

Meanwhile, the life of the city roared along. Cargo was laden aboard many of the vessels whose bow-sprits pointed toward the top storeys of the South-street buildings, and cargo was taken ashore from many others. Men with blackened clothes and faces poured coal into the holds of new-fangled steamers. "Cream! Cream! D'licious ice-cream!" shouted the peddlers, not even ceasing their hoarse cries when setting down their wooden pails to serve a clerk or apprentice, safely out of employer's sight.

Wine by the pipe, sugar and tobacco by the hogshead, pot-ash by the barrel, rum by the puncheon, nails by the keg, tea by the chest, cotton by the bale, and wool by the bag; shouting supercargoes, cursing carters, hoarse auctioneers, brokers scurrying between ship and shore and sale; grave old merchants and hard young sea-captains, red-faced dray- and barrow-men, pale-faced clerks and fresh

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faced 'prentice-boys; the reek of salt-fish, the cloying odor of molasses, the spicy scent of cinnamon-bark, the healthy smell of horses, and the sharp tang of new leather —all this was South-street, the city's premier water-front and the focal point of all New-York's commerce.

"Leatherhead! Leatherhead!" yelled a barefooted, dirty-legged boy, passing on the run. Breakstone paid no attention. The leather helmet he wore may not have been pretty, and it was often hot and heavy in the summertime, but —besides the protection it offered from brick-bars, stones, and clubs— it was the only article of uniform the New-York City Watch wore, and he was proud of it.

Otterburne's West-India Coffee-House was where Hays had said he would meet him, and there, in an upstairs room overlooking the East-River and Upper Harbor, was the High Constable himself, dipping his mahogany-colored face, for a change, into a mug of Mocha and milk.

"Have you got the answer to my riddle?" Hays asked, wiping his mouth on the back of one huge hand.

"Parts of it—I think." Then Breakstone abandoned his reserve and leaned forward eagerly. "I found out quite a bit when I was out in the boats. Do you know a Captain Lemuel Pierce, who has the *Sarah* coasting-sloop?" Hays considered for a second, then nodded. "Well, here's what it comes to: Roaring Roberts, who we found dead in the Old Brewery, had been seen more than once in company with Tim Scott—who we found in the alley three streets up from here. I'd mentioned to you that Scott had spoken of a mate named Billy Walters? Yes, and Billy Walters— who hasn't been seen of late!—had a great keloid on his left ear-lobe—"

Hays blew out his cheeks. "So *he* was the man they pulled out of Dunstan-Slip! This ties all three together with a second cord. And Lem Pierce—?" Billy Walters was said to have sailed with Captain Lem on their last voyage; Pierce's sloop was a coaster, and Tim Scott's last voyage was also on a coaster. "Lem has a wicked reputation," Hays said thoughtfully. "Coercion, crimping, blackmail, barratry, usurpation . . . I dare say he's turned his hand to a touch of piracy in his time, too. Where does the *Sarah* lie now, Constable? You've done well," he added, before Breakstone could answer. "Many a mickle makes a muckle—go on, you were saying?"

Breakstone said that the *Sarah* sloop had been down in Perth-Amboy, being over-hauled. Report was that she was on her way to the City, with only the Captain and a man from the ship-yard handling her, and should arrive just before sundown at Bayard's Wharf.

"Over-hauling costs money," Hays observed. "Scott and Roberts

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had been spending a lot of money, too. Bound together with a third cord, you see. And 'a three-fold cord is not easily broken', says the Proverbs of King Solomon. Come to think of it, there's another king mentioned in the Book of Proverbs. Yes. Just so. King Lemuel! Well, late to-night, about ten or so, we'll go down and visit this Lemuel and discuss Scripture—and other things!"

But when they visited that Lemuel they found him dead.

They had picked their way along the wharf through heaps of firewood the sawyers had prepared and left for galley-stoves. It was well past the farthest zone of gaslight and neither the dim ships'-lamps nor the tiny Watch-lanterns that Hays's men had did much more than make the ambient darkness seem darker.

"Ahoy, there!" Hays hailed a dim figure enjoying a pipe in the cool of above-decks. "Where's the *Sarah?* A sloop, just came in early this evening?"

Afterwards, he was to regret that hail. Then—"*Sarah?* Don't know the name, but a sloop made fast a few hours back, to the forward end of the wharf."

Her lamp was trim and bright, her paint fresh, her name bold and red. Captain Lemuel Pierce had clearly not been trying to hide. But no one answered the call and they boarded the vessel in silence. The cabin-door swung open and inside, on the deck, with his scabbard empty at his belt and his knife deep into his throat, lay the sloop's Captain.

"He's still bleeding!" Breakstone exclaimed.

"Search the ship," said Hays tersely. And then they heard it—a scrabble, a clatter, a thump, and the sound of running feet. They rushed top-side in time to see a man on the next wharf vanish into the darkness. Pursuit proved vain.

"He must have hopped over onto the ship behind this one," Hays said as they returned, winded and chagrined, "when he heard me hail and ask for the *Sarah.* Ah, well, let's do as we were about to do, anyway—search the ship."

But aside from water-ballast and a very small amount of stores, there was nothing to be found in the hold. Captain Pierce had bought a deal of new clothes, and in one coat-pocket there was a handful of gold eagles.

"A hundred dollars," Hays said, slipping the ten coins back. "A fortune for a sailor, but not so for a master. Did we scare off a robber before he could find it? Or was he a robber at all? The log—"

The log, however, listed nothing between the voyage from Perth-Amboy and one of six months previously to Wilmington, with a mixed cargo of linen, wine, rice, and flour: which was much too early for *the* voyage.

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"Not an honest man at all, you see," said Hays, almost sorrowfully. "Didn't keep a proper log. Even so—to murder a master of craft under my very nose, as it were! There's insolence for you! Ahum. What is that behind your feet, Mr. Breakstone?"

The Constable tried to move forward and look backward at the same time, and before he had even completed the movement he answered that it was "Just a scrap of paper." He blinked at Hays's steady gaze and air of still waiting, then he blushed. He stooped and picked it up, looked at it, handed it over. Hays gave it a quick glance.

"*Just* a scrap of paper? Look again—Leatherhead!"

The scrap was straight on one edge and jagged on the other, and it had a few words or parts of words on one side.

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"It seems to be part of some kind of legal paper," Breakstone said, after a moment.

"Just so." Hays's tone was almost grudging. "You ought to have seen it at once and handed it to me to find out *what* kind of legal paper. Trifles, trifles—but it's trifles that count! I sign this kind of legal paper by the dozen. Had I a quarter-of-a-dollar fee for each one—which I don't!—I could have bought a summer-cottage up at Spikin-Duyvil by now. Well, listen: I'll emphasize the words you see here:

"'. . . *a* Seaman of this city, and a Man of Color, is *known to* me on good evidence to be a FREE MAN, and I *do further* Enjoin all Men of whatsoever Cities, States, Territories, and Nations, to recognize him in such *Status and*—', and so forth. We give these to the Black seamen in case they put in to a port of a slave state or a slave-holding colony or country, to keep them from being seized and sold. Now, what does it tell you?"

"That the man who killed the Captain was a Black seaman?"

"Not necessarily—but it hints at that, very powerfully, yes. Some one who wanted the papers of a free Negro sailor was here to see Pierce—he grabbed for it—but Pierce held on tight—it tore. Let's follow the obvious trail first. We know that Captain Lem had come into money lately. We know the same of Tim Scott and Roaring Roberts. Pierce spent his on the sloop. The other two poured it out like wine. Now. Do you know of any Colored sailors who've been known to spend lavishly of late?"

The wake of a passing vessel rocked the sloop. The cabin-lamp stayed level in its gimbals, but its light trembled a bit just the same, sending shadows across the High Constable's craggy face.

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"No, not lavishly—that's to say, not foolishly. But now that I think about it," Breakstone mused aloud, "Cudjo Washington used to sail, on and off. And just a little while ago he opened an oyster-cellar in lower Collect-street, not far south of Anthony. A dicty place, as I think of it now—dicty for an oyster-cellar in Collect-street, that is. It must have cost him something."

Hays summoned the two Night Constables who had been standing guard at the foot of Bayard's Wharf and the one next to it, told one to rattle at the Coroner's shutters, and the other one to stand by the body—a task he plainly had no fancy for, but plainly he had even less fancy to refuse Old Hays.

"And now," said Old Hays, "We'll call on Cudjo Washington. I could relish a basin of little-necks or cherry-stones, I believe. But I'd relish information even more."

There were more men about that night than was usual for the hour, and presently some one called out from a little group which was gathered under a lamp-post.

"Jacob! Hello, there! Stop a bit." Hays crossed over and recognized Alderman Ter Williger, Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Jonathan Goodhue, the fancy dry-goods importer, and his partner, Mr. Perit.

"These are late hours, gentlemen," Hays commented, "for merchants who must be up early to-morrow."

"Ah, it's to-morrow that keeps us up so late to-night," said Ter Williger genially. "To-morrow is the first of the month—that means to-night is packet-night—we've all been staying late at our counting-houses getting everything in order against the packet-vessels' sailing in the morning. Come and take a glass of lager-beer with us, Jacob: join us in a well-earned quarter-hour of ease." And, with a *Yes, yes,* and a *Do, sir,* Messrs. Goodhue and Perit seconded the invitation.

But Hays shook his head. "I'm off to Collect-street on business. And while lager is available there, I'll not invite you to join me. An ugly business and an ugly neighborhood."

Ter Williger, Goodhue, and Perit pursed their lips and raised their eyebrows. Jenkins drew out a segar, a match, and a piece of glassed paper, struck fire and lit up.

"Is that one of the new Congreve matches?" Mr. Perit asked. Jenkins, his mouth occupied with drawing smoke, didn't answer.

"Yes, it is," said Goodhue. "A great improvement over the old acid bottle. Well, well, then, Mr. Hays, we daren't detain you. Another time, perhaps."

"To be sure. Yes, we must go now. A good-night, gentlemen."

Collect-street, below Anthony-street, while not offering the amenities of, say, Washington-square, was still a cut or two above the Five-Points. A stranger might be

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lured into a room here, and beaten and robbed, and he might die of it; but he was not likely to be murdered in the open street for fun.

Several fences operated almost openly, ready to buy anything from a dead man's dirty shirt for a penny to a nob's gold watch for a dollar. There were the usual saloons and "grocery" stores, including that of the infamous Rosanna Spears. But to-night only one place of business on the street interested Jacob Hays. It was easy enough to spot; its lights were brighter and its paint fresher than the rest.

The Great Republic Oyster-Cellar, by C. Washington, stated a signboard; and continued, *Fresh and Pickled Oysters, Clams, Hard-shell and Soft-shell Crabs, Garnished Lobsters. Fringed Hams. Fresh Country Fruit.*

The interior was neat and clean and contained several tables, a row of booths along one wall, and even the unusual glory of a glass-fronted show-case in which reposed half of a fringed ham, a huge platter heaped high with fried soft-shell crabs, bowls of fruit, and part of a roasted pig with a lemon in its mouth. A whitewashed keg displayed the necks of bottles of ginger-beer, porter, lager-beer, and mead, the rest of the bottles being concealed by cracked ice. On the rear wall were large steel engravings of Generals Washington and Jackson, and a smaller one of Governor Clinton.

It was, indeed, "rather a dicty place for Collect-street". It could not very well have been furnished and provisioned on the savings from a seaman's wages.

Present in the room were a Negro couple, evidently the proprietor and his wife, and several white couples, the men and women dressed in clothes which managed to look at the same time both flashy and bedraggled. The customers glanced up from their refreshments, sat for a moment transfixed at the sight of Hays and Breakstone, tensed, exchanged glances, and then as it was made obvious that the door was not being blocked and that none of them was engaging the attention of the law—relaxed somewhat: that is, if slouching in their seats and hiding their faces with arms propped on elbows may be considered relaxing.

The proprietor, a powerfully-built man in his early middle years, pressed himself back against the wall with something clenched in his fist. His wife retreated wordlessly to a corner.

"Cudjo Washington," said Hays, advancing and holding out his staff, "I call upon you, as a citizen of this city, to lay down that oyster-knife." The implement fell with a clatter.

After a second Washington said, "Before the Lord, I didn't know it was you, gentlemen. I thought—" He ran his tongue over his lips, then came forward to the counter

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with a mechanical smile and an attitude of well-practised deference. "What will you gentlemen be pleased to have?" he asked.

"A few words with you in your back-room. Your wife can stay here to wait on the patrons." Breakstone posted himself outside.

"Well?" asked Hays. It was dark in the room. Only a small piece of candle burned in a saucer.

"I didn't know what they was up to, Mr. High Constable. I never found out until it was too late." The man's voice was low, but it came from a huge chest and throat, and rumbled out into the shadows. As to what he meant by what he had said, Jacob Hays had no idea at all. He generally avoided opening a conversation with a suspected man in terms of accusing him of a specific crime. *Well?* was usually opening enough. Often the single syllable put mind and tongue to something quite different from what the High Constable had been thinking of, something of which the High Constable had known nothing. One could, after all, always take up later the matter which had prompted the inquiry in the first place.

"He hadn't no right to keep hold of my papers. No right a-tall," Cudjo was saying. But this was not exactly what Hays was expecting him to say. Ah, well, wait a bit. Let the man talk. But all the talk, it became obvious, was on lines other than the first comment. Had Cudjo realized that he had started to give himself away? And, so considering, Hays realized that he himself was no longer thinking in terms of a simple murder.

He *would* have to lead the conversation, after all. Well, so be it. "What were they up to, Cudjo, and just when did you find it out?"

The man's eyes seemed red in the candle-light. Was there cunning in them? "You says—what, sir?" Hays repeated his words. "I mean to say," Cudjo evaded, "what was he up to, keeping my papers? Now, they was mine, legal. So—"

"So you killed him."

A confident laugh. "Cap'n Pierce? No, sir! He too mean to die!"

"Not when he'd gotten a knife in his throat, he wasn't." The laugh ebbed away, the man scanned Hays's face. His huge chest swelled. He shook his head dumbly. "Mr. Breakstone! Send the woman in here . . . Now, what time did your husband come back tonight?"

"Why 'twas about—" She checked herself and looked at her husband. But he sat still, utterly still. Her voice dropped a notch, became uncertain. "Why, master, he was here all night. He never go out." She looked from Hays to her husband, pleadingly. But neither offered aught for her comfort. She began to wail.

Cudjo accompanied them quietly to the Watch-house.

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"If you didn't kill Captain Pierce," Hays asked, and asked over and over again, "then why were you so afraid when we walked in? Why did you pick up the oyster-knife? You said, 'I didn't know it was you. I thought—' *What* did you think? Who were you expecting? Who are the 'they' you talked about? What was it you 'found out they were up to'? Why was it 'too late' by then?"

Then, still getting no response, Hays put to him the brutally suggestive, but terribly pertinent, question, "Cudjo, have you ever seen a man hanged?"

Sweat popped out on the man's broad face. He began to shake his head—and continued to shake it. It seemed he could not stop. Soon his whole body was shaking from side to side. He essayed speech, but his voice clicked in his throat. Hays brought him a mug of water, and he swallowed it greedily.

"I will tell you, master," he said, after a moment. "I see there is no help for it. I will tell you everything. It begin two, three months ago."

Two or three months previously, Cudjo had been living in a corner of a room in the Shambles tenement on Cherry-street, in the Fourth Ward. He had had no job in a long time, and only the pittance which his wife earned by peddling hot-roasted corn through the streets kept them from actual starvation. Captain Lemuel Pierce came and offered him a berth for a coasting voyage, and Cudjo had jumped at it.

"You got your free papers, don't you, Cudj?" There had been no slaves in New-York State since the Emancipation of 1827, and Cudjo had been free even before then, for his owner had brought him North and manumitted him. He knew that Captain Pierce must be referring to his seaman's papers.

"Yes, sir. I got'm. We going South, Cap'n?"

Pierce smiled, showed yellow teeth. "We ain't goin' to Nova-Scoshy. Better hand them papers over to me for safe-keeping, Cudj. That way, I c'n take care."

Pierce was obliging enough to advance $2 on wages, which were given to Phoebe Washington, and to promise warm clothes as soon as they got aboard. The two proceeded to Staten-Island, where the *Sarah* was lying off a small creek which emptied into the Kill-Van-Kull. Roaring Roberts was first mate. Tim Scott and Billy Walters made up the rest of the crew. They put out to sea on the next tide.

"He never come out of the cabin till the second day," said Cudjo. "But I knew his face."

"Whose?" Hays asked.

"Mr. Jones's." And who was he and what did he look like? He was a big man with a red face. Cudjo had "seen him around"; more he knew not. Mentally Hays ran over

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all the Joneses he could think of, from Ap Jones the cow-keeper to Zimri Jones, who sold woollens. None fitted the picture.

The *Sarah* was dirty, but Captain Pierce had kept her in good shape otherwise. He and Mr. Jones had had words right from the start. Jones, who apparently had chartered the slope, objected to any one's—particularly the Captain's—drinking "until the job's done." Pierce had said that he was master aboard his own vessel and would drink what and when he pleased; forthwith he applied himself to his demijohn.

Neither Cudjo nor any of the three White sailors had any idea of where they were bound, except that it was, in Pierce's words, "Somewhere South and warm." It was after they had passed Cape Fear that Pierce and Jones revealed their destination to him. "They had to," Washington said. "They needed me. Cap'n Pierce knew I was born in Brunswick and had sailed all those waters."

"You ought to know St. Simon's Sound pretty well, I guess," said Pierce.

"Oh, yes, sir. My old master—"

"Damn your old master!" said Pierce. "Do you know where Remington's Landing is? You do. All right. You'll pilot us there."

They lay well off shore till dark, then entered St. Simon's Sound, then Tuppah Cove. Remington's Landing lay up an inlet into the Cove. The moon was full and bright. Captain Pierce, aided by the winds, had planned well.

"Take care, Cudj," he said; and then a while before they came up to the wharf, "you—no noise!"

The ship's-lamps were extinguished. Silent as a ghost ship, the sloop moored. The shed by the wharf was full of baled cotton. Without words, directed by gestures, they all set to work loading it aboard. Even Pierce and Jones took off their coats and pitched in.

After a while—Cudjo didn't know how long—they became aware that some one was looking at them. It was the Negro watchman. Evidently he had been taking a nap on one of the bales. He stared at the scene—and an eerie scene it must have been, too—the six strange men toiling silently in the pool of moonlight. His voice, when he spoke, was tremulous.

"What—what are you White men doing with that there cotton? It belongs to Master Remington, and I know it ain't done been sold!"

They could have told him some lie and kept him silent, Cudjo said, recounting the story to Hays. Tied him up, maybe. But Jones pulled out a knife and at the sight of it the watchman turned and was off like the wind. He had no chance, of course. They were on him before he could cry out. Cudjo, standing aghast, saw an arm rise and fall twice. Then the five men dragged the body aside into the grass. Cudjo

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was still standing, numbly, when they returned, and gestured him back to work.

They were at sea again by dawn.

"What happened to the cotton?" Hays asked.

It was hot in the Watch-house; the wick in the whale-oil lamp needed trimming, but somehow he could not put his mind to asking the Night Constable-in-charge to take care of it. Here, then, was the story of the theft of the Sea-Island cotton in Georgia, of which he had been notified weeks back. It had been carried out by men recruited under his very nose, so to speak: Billy Walters, Roaring Roberts, Tim Scott, Captain Pierce, Cudjo Washington. Who had been behind it? Mr. Jones. which ones were still alive? Cudjo Washington and Mr. Jones.

"What happened to the cotton?" Hays asked again. He knew well enough what had happened to the men.

The proprietor of The Great Republic Oyster-Cellar shook his head. "I don't know, Mr. High Constable. We put in to Philadelphia—didn't tie up, though, just lay out in the river—and Mr. Jones and Captain Pierce rowed ashore. They come back inside of an hour and Mr. Jones had a sight of money with him. I expect he'd been to the bank. They paid us off and told us to get our gear together and go ashore. Not to come back. He warned us—Mr. Jones, I mean. 'Don't let me see you in New-York,' he said. 'I'm paying you extra for that,' he said, 'so you better not try to fool me.' Said to me, 'Send for your wife. Don't go back for her.' He had a mean look to him. A hard man."

"And you took the money? The proceeds of the stolen cotton? For you knew that's what it was, for all he paid you in advance."

Cudjo nodded. "He said I had to take it. Said he'd kill me if I didn't. 'You're in this, too,' he said, 'the same as the rest of us. If I were you I'd go far away.' So I took it. And I was afraid to say any thing. I could've thrown it away, all but my wages. But it was more money than I'd ever seen, almost. I thought, I'll hold on to it for a while and study this. Then—'Send for your wife,' he said. I can't write and she can't read. I come up here to see her and study what to do. And when I saw that rat's-hole we were living in—in the Shambles—and her tired out from crying hot-roasting-ears up and down the streets—"

He had succumbed to the temptation and had used the money to fit up the oyster-cellar. A sailor's life was hard, and usually, not a long one. The rest of the story was easy enough—in part—for Hays to imagine. One by one the three other sailors made their way back to New-York in defiance of "Mr. Jones's" warning. One of them must have preferred to spend his

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share of the crime in Philadelphia, or—Hays remembered the worn, worn shoes found on another's feet—or in some other place no closer to New-York.

"Jones" must have been a fool to think they would stay away. As soon as their money was spent they must have tried to blackmail him—tried alone, almost certainly, not in concert, for each had been killed alone and separately. Perhaps Jones hadn't even known that Cudjo had returned to New-York.

"What happened on the sloop tonight?" Hays asked. Somewhere off in the city a church-bell sounded the hour. How quickly the night was passing!

Washington had forgotten to ask for his free papers in Philadelphia. Presently he remembered, but did nothing. If he needed them, by some dire chance, to go to sea again, he could get another set. Chiefly, though, he worried about their remaining in the hands of Captain Pierce—Captain Pierce, whose evil reputation he knew as well as Hays did, and whose evil nature he knew even better, having sailed under him. But Pierce was off in Perth-Amboy, having the *Sarah* over-hauled.

"Are you going to wait in your cellar till he picks his own time and comes to kill you, like he did the others? Well, I'm not," Pierce had said. "You'd think he'd know better than to threaten me, wouldn't you? You'd think he'd speak sweet to me, but, no. 'Stay out of New-York, Pierce. I warn you!'" Cap'n Lem had mimicked "Jones". Cap'n Lem had been drinking, in his little cabin there in the sloop at Bayard's Wharf. "Well, I don't fancy staying out of New-York, see? And I don't relish the idea of being killed on some dark night. No, Cudj, I tell you: there's only this—*kill him before he kills us!*"

But Cudjo had had enough of that. Four men were already killed, including the slave watchman down on St. Simon's-Island. It was Cudjo's belief that the White men would still be living if they hadn't tried to get more money out of "Jones". All that Cudjo wanted was his free papers back. And Captain Lemuel Pierce refused to deliver them. He showed them, he laughed, he drew them back. They were to be the price of Cudjo's assistance in the death of "Jones." They had quarreled, the master of the *Sarah* grew ugly, Cudjo had snatched at papers and torn them from Pierce's grasp. Then he had run off. That was all. That was his story.

Hays was rather inclined to believe him.

But who was "Jones"?

A few hours' sleep, and the High Constable was up and on duty again. As soon as breakfast was over he stalked down-town, on his way to Ter Williger's place of business. Old Nick would be pleased

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to know that the matter of theft of the Sea-Island cotton from St. Simon's had been solved.

And then, as if his thoughts had become tangible, the word "Gloves" appeared in front of his eyes. Hays stopped short, looked carefully. There it was, in the window of that little shop. *D. MacNab, Leather and Leather-Findings. Cobbler's Supplies. Saddlery and Harness. Books Bound. Gloves Mended. Fire-men's and Watch-men's Helmets.*

Hays passed under the wooden awning and walked up three steps. A bell tinkled as he opened the door.

"What can you tell me any thing about this glove?" he asked.

"That it's no' yours, Mr. Hays."

The High Constable laughed shortly. "I know that. And if *you* do, it must mean that you know whose it is, Mr. MacNab."

"Och aye? Must it? It's nae muckle thing to ken whose hand fits a glove, and whose doesna." And, as Hays digested this, and ruefully admitted the man was right, MacNab said, "But it sae happens that I do ken whose it is, for I mended it masel'. And what's mare, I mended another for the same mon—slashed across the palm it was—and handed it back not an hour syne."

Not trying to conceal his excitement, Hays leaned across the counter. "What's his name, MacNab?"

But MacNab said, "Och, that I dinna ken. A big man, wi' a sonsy red face on him. He didna come in himsel', this time, he sent the coachman wi' the money. 'Mak' haste', says the coachie, 'for he's complainin' we won't get to the Battery in time to catch the packet-ship.' So I took the siller and gave over the glove, and that's all I ken aboot it."

Calling his thanks over his shoulder, Hays ran out.

It took three cabs, one after the other, to get him to the Battery without the horses foundering. And all the clocks along the route displayed each a truly Republican and Democratic spirit of independence, no two agreeing. He was in constant agony that he might not make his destination in time. He pondered, not for the first time, on the absurdity of the head of the only effective police-force in the State (if not the nation!) being dependent on common carriers to convey him wherever his own feet could not. He allowed himself the uncommon luxury of a dream: a light carriage, the property of the Watch, drawn by a team of swift and strong horses, ditto. But it was only a dream. "Economy in government" was the official policy—except, of course, where official corruption was the cord. So far, at any rate, the sachems of the Tammany Wigwam had refrained from taking over the Watch. Which meant economy.

Blocks before the Battery he be-

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gan to groan, for the crowds streaming away meant that all the farewells had been said and the ferry for the packet-ships had already left. The spectacle of the speeding cab (though devilish little speed could it manage in these crowded streets despite the fact that Hays was standing half-up and gesturing other vehicles aside) attracted the attention of the crowd, and there were loud comments—most of which contained the words *Old Hays!*

He leapt from the cab as soon as it drew up at the wharf, and dashed through the lingering groups of people. A corner of his eye observed three known pickpockets, but he did not stop. That is, he did not stop until he saw that the ferry had gone, gone so definitely that he could not even pick it out amidst the thronged shipping of the harbor. As he drew up short, dismay large and plain upon his rugged face, a fierce and stalwart young man, with cold blue eyes and a rather hard-looking mouth, appeared out of the crowd and demanded, "What's up?"

"Oh, Corneel—I've got to get aboard the packet-ship before she leaves—"

"Which one? Two bound for Liverpool, two for New Orleans, and one each for London, Havre, and Charleston. Take your pick, I've got a steam-launch."

Which one, indeed? Liverpool was the cotton-port of England, and Jenkins had done business with the Captain of *one* of the Liverpool packets, at any rate. But, through the noise and clamor, he heard, as if in his ear, the voice of Mrs. Jenkins: *Mais, ooh, la belle France!*

"The Havre packet, Corneel! That'll be it! But can we make it in time?"

With a flurry of oaths Corneel declared that he would soon put Hays aboard her, and ripped out orders. Almost at once a small, trim steam-launch appeared and they tumbled into it. Corneel took the wheel himself, and in another minute the paddles were thrashing and the whistle was screaming.

"Damn my tripes!" Corneel shouted. "This is like the old days! Remember when I was Captain of old Gibbons' steamer, hey?"

Hays nodded. "In open violation of the monopoly that New-York State had given Livingstone and Fulton," he pointed out. "Wherefore, it was my plain duty to arrest you. I told you I'd do it if I had to carry you ashore. I *did* do it and I *did* have to carry you ashore!"

Corneel roared with laughter, damned his tripes again, and various other things, swore luridly at the pilots of any vessels which did not instantly veer out of his way at the sound of his whistle; and in very short time they had beaten a white, frothy path across the blue waters and were in the cool shadow of the huge ocean-goer.

"Ahoy, the *Hannibal* packet!"

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Corneel shouted, his crew-man seizing the ladder—which was still down to let the pilot off—with the boat-hook; then quickly fastening on with the line.

A row of curious faces looked down at them from above. Corneel and Hays clambered up the ladder and confronted the somewhat astonished Captain. Hays lifted his staff of office. His eyes picked out one face from the crowd, and a thickly-packed crowd it was too; for few had chosen to go below and miss the passage down the Bay and through the Narrows. It was a face easy to pick out, once it had been described. "A big man with a red face," Cudjo had said. "A sonsy red face," was MacNab's description. Hays wondered at his never having made the connection.

"What brings you aboard, Mr. Hays?" asked Captain Delano.

"A desire to ask a question or two of your passenger, here—" Hays stopped in front of the man, who greeted him with the same affable smile he had worn at their previous meeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Hays. Have you had any success in your quest for information about Nankeen?" he inquired.

"Good morning, Mr. Jenkins. Yes, I have. Do you know this glove?" For just a fleeting second the smile seemed to slip. "No, I'm afraid I don't."

"Try it on," said Hays. "Let me have your left hand."

Jenkins drew the hand away and Hays caught it. For a moment they stood face to face, breast to breast, hand in hand. A little breeze blew across the deck. No one else spoke. Jenkins was a large man and a powerful one. But, still, slowly but surely, inch by inch, Hays drew his right hand back, and clenched in his right hand was the left hand of Mr. James Jenkins.

Suddenly Jenkins laughed. "An odd jest, sir. But I'm willing to oblige you."

His resistance ceased, and he held out the reluctant hand, clad in a fawn-colored glove. For all his amiability he moved slowly, but the fawn-colored glove came off and the glove Hays held out—one of gray leather—went on.

"Now, sir, are you content?" Jenkins demanded, still smiling.

"Perfectly." Hays held out his High Constable's staff. "James Jenkins, alias Jones," he said, "I take you into custody on a charge of having murdered Billy Walters, Tim Scott, Henry Roberts, and Lemuel Pierce, all in the City of New-York; and one Negro man, a slave, name unknown to me, on St. Simon's-Island in the State of Georgia."

The smile entirely left Jenkins's face, which had gone white—then the color came flooding back, but not the smile.

"Captain Delano," said Hays, "I trust you will render whatever aid may be necessary."

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Jenkins had found his tongue, and turned it glibly on the Captain. "I've never heard of any of these men, sir," he said stoutly. "Nor have I ever been to St. Simon's-Island. What is this nonsense about gloves and murders? I know many passengers will vouch for my character."

"There are those ashore," said Hays, "who can vouch for it, too! Went South not long ago to buy Nankeen, did you? Never a bit of it! Chartered Lem Pierce's sloop to go South and fill it full of stolen Sea-Island cotton, is what you did! And killed the poor Negro who was guarding it! No wonder you got rid of the bales so fast—sold them to the master of the outward-bound Liverpool packet just by good luck? Never a bit of it! Planned, planned! Every step of the way!

"But you hadn't planned on your accomplices returning to blackmail you, did you? Still, you drew up a plan soon enough for that: you lured them to dark places under pretense of payment, and there you killed them. Billy Walters was the first one. He was found with a piece of cotton in his mouth. Raw cotton—Nankeen—such as you dealt in, Jenkins. What was the cotton doing in a dead man's mouth? Here—"

Hays plucked the gray glove from the hand in which Jenkins, having taken it off, was holding it.

"Roaring Roberts, another of the lot, was found dead in the Old Brewery, and this glove at the entrance to his room. And Tim Scott, the third sailor of the crew of the sloop, was strangled to death in an alley off South-street. What is the connection in the circumstances of their deaths? Why, this—on Scott's neck were the marks of only nine fingers. Where was the tenth?"

In an instant Hays had seized the left hand of James Jenkins and held it up for all to see.

"There is no tenth," he said. *"Jenkins has only four fingers on his left hand!* That is why he always wears gloves! Look at the little finger of this glove: it has no creases. If I were to turn it inside out you'd see how the leather is darkened by use on the other four digits—but not on this one! And to hide the fact of his missing finger even more, Jenkins always stuffs the empty digit with raw cotton fibre. Look at this—"

Hays held out the fawn-colored glove. Four of its fingers hung loosely, but the fifth stayed as plump as if it had a flesh-and-blood finger inside it. Hays fished inside and the little finger went limp as he pulled out a piece of cotton stuffing.

Some thing like a sigh went up from the crowd.

"Now, examine the little finger of this first glove again," Hays continued. "See how the thread at the end is a lighter color? Why? The end had been mended and the thread hadn't yet worn as dark as

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the rest. But why did it need mending? Because when you, Jenkins, attacked Walters, he bit your hand, tearing the glove open and forcing the cotton stuffing out through the rip his teeth made! And before he could spit it out, his neck was broken, and he was a dead man! And in your fight with Roberts you lost the glove and were afraid to go back for it, weren't you?"

Jenkins, unsmiling now, said nothing.

"You had Duncan MacNab mend the first glove. He did his job well, so when you killed Captain Lem Pierce and found the palm of the glove that you had on then had been slashed by Pierce's knife, you took it to MacNab, too. And just got it back to-day. Let's see the other glove to this fawn-colored pair, Jenkins."

Jenkins thrust both hands deep into his pockets. There was a hard, ugly expression upon his face. "Let's see your warrant—Leatherhead!" he demanded.

Hays shook his head. "None needed to apprehend a fugitive fleeing the State to avoid prosecution."

Jenkins sneered, "You don't know much law, Leatherhead. Your jurisdiction ended back at the Battery."

Hays said calmly that they were still in New-York State waters, and that if it became necessary, he was prepared to make a citizen's arrest. Jenkins had something to say about that, but there was an interruption.

"Damn my tripes! Are you trying to keep us talking till we're out past the three-mile limit? Belay that!" And Corneel rushed forward, seized Jenkins around the waist and threw him over the side of the ship. He fell, screaming and kicking, while the ladies shrieked and swooned. Without even waiting for the splash, Corneel clattered down the ladder, Hays behind him.

Jenkins surfaced, and screamed in terror. "I can't swim! Help me, I can't swim!" He grabbed at and caught the boat-hook and was hoisted aboard the launch, where he lay, sodden and sobbing.

"If he makes any trouble, Corneel, hit him with the boat-hook—the blunt end." Hays craned his neck upward. "If Mrs. Jenkins wishes to come ashore," he called, "we'll wait for her." They waited several minutes. Then a steward pushed his head over.

"She won't come, sir. She's locked the door of her cabin and she says she won't come out."

Jenkins's face swelled.

"Cast off," Corneel directed.

"The trull!" Jenkins said, his voice thick. "The slut! I'd never have done it if it weren't for her. 'When are we going to have a house of our own, Mr. Jenkins? When are we going to have a carriage of our own? And now the dirty—"

But Corneel told him to mind his tongue and not speak that way of ladies. Jenkins looked at him with his red eyes. "Who in the

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devil's name are you?" he asked.

"Cornelius Vanderbilt. *Not* at your service, except as the High Constable directs. Killed five men, did he, Hays?"

"Three sailors and a sea-captain in New-York and a slave down in Georgia."

Corneel took off his cap. "May the Lord have mercy on their souls." He clapped it back on again and blew his whistle and damned the eyes of the pilot of the New-Brunswick ferry. There were death and evil in Jenkins's face as he looked at them, but Hays held the boat-hook, and all around them were the deep, deep waters.

The crowd at the Battery, far from having dispersed, was larger than it had been. Word of the High Constable's chase and his dash across the harbor had evidently gotten around. No one could any more believe that Old Hays had gone jaunting off to Europe than they could believe it of the Battery itself. Every spy-glass in town seemed to have followed the steam-launch, and there were cheers as they stepped on shore.

They'll cheer at the hanging too, Hays thought, for hanged Jenkins would certainly be. Not even a member of the Cotton Exchange could get away with four local murders. Cudjo would get off, though, if he turned State's evidence; as he would have to in order to avoid extradition on the Georgia charge.

There were four Constables waiting to take the prisoner into custody. One of them was young Breakstone. "Now we know the answer," he said, "to who has nine fingers and kills sailors." But Jenkins said not one word.

An officious, well-dressed, and over-fed man slapped Hays on the back. "A marvellous job of work, High Constable!" he crowed, as if he had directed it himself. "You may well congratulate yourself that it's done. Now it's up to the judge and jury—your job is over!"

Hays looked at the man's pompous and moon-like face. Then he looked out over the teeming harbor, and then back to the city almost hid behind the forest of masts along the water-front; the city ever growing, thronged with new-comers from Europe and America.

As he thought of its swarming and wretched tenements and its corrupt administration, the High Constable reflected that crime—as witness Jenkins—was found in high places as well as low, and that greed and vice would go always hand in hand. Hays shook his head sadly.

"No," he said, "it's not done. It's not even begun."

The plump citizen seemed to feel a response was expected of him. He chuckled. But a slight blankness on his bland countenance seemed to indicate that he did not quite take in the High Constable Hays's meaning.

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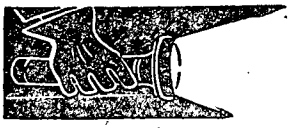

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Permit an old devotee of blood and thunder to introduce himself. Having been improving my mind with sensational fiction for fifty years, I step into the critic's pulpit with few qualms and little diffidence. But it may be as well, at the outset, to define critical policy. As a reader of this magazine, you are more than devoted to blood and thunder; you want only the best blood and thunder on the market. And only the best will be drawn to your attention here—but limitations of space compel me to mention comparatively few names.

Frequently it may occur that no given month will produce, say, four first-class mysteries; to expect a corker every week were optimism run mad. Failing a sufficiency of outstanding new books, I shall beg leave to mention old favorites, especially those now available in paperback. Nor are paperback originals barred from consideration; as with murder methods, anything goes.

Now a note of warning. Since the reviewer for a monthly magazine must deliver his copy months in advance, it is seldom possible for him to be fully up to date. Please bear this in mind. When some major piece of sensationalism appears, your obedient servant will get to it as soon as he can. Try not to curse me if the appreciation should be a trifle delayed.

The Valentine Estate, by Stanley Ellin (Random House, $5.95) is loaded with high explosive. Young Chris Monte, former tennis star now lamed and reduced to menial work at Miami Beach, receives what may be the coldest, most cynical of proposals. Elizabeth Jones, that seemingly uninteresting girl, is to inherit the estate of a deceased British tycoon who has felt indebted to her late father. Purely as a business proposition, she offers Chris fifty thousand dollars if he will agree to a marriage of convenience. Chris, less cynical than his own conduct would indicate, soon falls for this. And then up jumps the devil.

Too often, in stories of some great estate dangled as bait, it develops that there is no estate: that the whole thing has been mistake or fraud to begin with. Since the reader will soon sympathize both with Chris and with Beth, he may be assured that there really is a great estate, which the right person will inherit before they've finished.

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But nothing else is quite what it appears. Blood flows, bullets fly, there are half a dozen mistakes or frauds as the action whips by jet from Miami to Boston, then across the sea to London for a shattering surprise finale in Bayswater Road. And yet all the clues are there. **The Valentine Estate** is the best thriller I have read for some time.

If you think Wall Street and big business won't fit into an engrossing murder mystery, try **Come to Dust,** by Emma Lathen (Simon and Schuster, $4.95). Steady-going Elliot Patterson of Target Associates disappears into the blue; an immensely valuable bearer bond disappears too. Where is Patterson with the bearer bond? Who stabbed that noisy, drunken youth at historic Brunswick College in New Hampshire?

Once more John Putnam Thatcher, senior vice-president of the Sloan Guaranty Trust, investigates a crime with its roots as deep in human nature as in finance. Emma Lathen, my spies assure me, is in fact Miss Lathen; she is no poker-playing male disguised. But she plays brilliant poker, and never deals from the bottom of the deck. Wit, humor, and craftsmanship are at their best here.

Wit, humor, and craftsmanship also mark **Death and the Dutch Uncle**, by Patricia Moyes (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $3.95). When a hapless smalltime crook is shot down in a London pub, according to all evidence by some grotesque entity wearing sunglasses and a bushy false beard, Scotland Yard has no reason to fear international repercussions.

But repercussions, rolling as far away as Africa, send Superintendent Henry Tibbett and his wife from London to Amsterdam, and to some very wicked business beside a Dutch canal. Miss Moyes, herself a lady of much charm in dealing 'em, wins almost every hand and deserves it. This is classic detection with a kick.

To name one more enchantress in conclusion, I give you Dorothy Dunnett's **The Photogenic Soprano** (Houghton Mifflin, $4.95), told in the first person by the photogenic soprano herself. A spy story against Scottish backgrounds, it begins with homicide in Edinburgh and wallops along during a yacht race through the Outer Hebrides. In search of her lover, who may have sabotaged the nuclear submarine *Lysander,* Tina Rossi walks into more trouble whenever the yacht touches an island or even slows down.

The narrative itself never slows. Floating mines drift in sea-caves; at Kinloch Castle there is murder to pipe-organ music. If the author does not always drop clues with the thump of a corpse falling from a cupboard, she drops broad feminine hints all the way. This is not a sentimental tale, take warning. "But still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland, And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

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a *NEW* crime story by

ROBERT L. FISH

Meet a different Robert L. Fish—at least, a Robert L. Fish different from the one you are accustomed to read in EQMM. Here is not the parodist and the punster, the humorist poking fun at the sacred canon. Here is the serious Mr. Fish in a straightforward study of crime—well, perhaps not entirely straightforward . . .

DOUBLE ENTRY

by ROBERT L. FISH

"I DON'T LIKE IT," GEORGE MORTON said stubbornly.

There was something almost petulant in his tone, like that of a child being driven to a task against his will. He was a middle-aged, nondescript, balding man, growing to fat. His wrinkled suit bagged at the ankles, bunched itself across his stomach, straining the buttons. He turned from his position near the windows of the swank apartment where he had been staring morosely down at the snow-covered meadows of Central Park, and walked over to the small bar that furnished one corner of the elegant room. He seated himself on one of the stools, frowned across the counter at his host, and repeated:

"I don't like it."

His words made no visible impression on the other. Jerry Reed was a tall dapper man with a hairline mustache and an almost military haircut. He continued to carefully measure gin and vermouth into the ice-filled pitcher and then to stir it even more carefully. He slowly decanted the contents into a tall stemmed glass, and smiled. It was a faintly sardonic smile.

"Who said you had to like it?" Jerry Reed poured a glass of beer for his guest and pushed it across the bar together with a bottle of bourbon. A two-ounce shot glass was added to the collection. "Who ever said you had to like any of them?"

He picked up his martini and carried it to the coffee table, lowering himself into an easy chair and holding his drink protectively as

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he sat. His eyes came up to the face of the man at the bar and he raised his glass slightly.

"Cheers."

"Cheers." Morton poured himself a shot of bourbon, downed it, then sipped at his beer.

"Now, then," Jerry said briskly, leaning forward and setting his partially emptied glass on a coaster on the table, "Why don't you like it?"

"I never killed a woman before."

Jerry sighed. When he spoke his voice had lost its amusement, had turned flat. "When they're dead, they're not men or women any more. They're just bodies. Sexless. Clay. Mud. And you've seen enough of them. And produced enough of them."

"But I never hit a woman before."

"So this time it's a woman. She won't be any less dead for that. Or any deader, either." Reed studied the other man emotionlessly. "You like the money, don't you?"

"Of course I like the money."

"And your wife doesn't think all that nice spendable money just comes from your so-called job as a bookkeeper, does she?"

"My wife doesn't know about the money," Morton said, and reached for the bottle, pouring himself another drink. "I don't even lay out all the dough I earn at the office. She thinks we're broke and I let her think so." His voice was emotionless. "If she knew how much money we really have I'd never get another minute's peace. When it's time for me to retire she'll know."

Reed smiled, pleased to allow the subject to drift from the assignment, satisfied to wait until Morton was in the proper mood. "That's smart. Keep them barefoot, ignorant, and pregnant, I always say."

"Janie never could get pregnant," Morton said absently, and shrugged. "I don't mind. I'm too old to stand the noise of kids, anyway, I guess."

"And how does she feel about your drinking?"

"She doesn't know about that, either. And she better not." The second drink had brought a touch of truculence into the heavy man's voice. Jerry watched him calmly as the glass on the counter top was replenished for the third time and then allowed to sit. Morton always followed the same pattern: the third drink, when finally taken, would eliminate the hostility, bring him back to normal. And Jerry Reed knew from long experience that the alcohol was not to build up false courage. Morton was the best there was. It was simply habit.

"I chew some gum and suck on some drops I've got before I go home," George said; and dismissed the subject, getting back to another statement of Reed's that his present mood rejected. "And don't call it any 'so-called bookkeeping job.' We

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hire accountants, not bookkeepers. And I'm the assistant office manager down there. It's a real enough job, all right."

"You're also a professional killer," Reed reminded him gently. "Working for me." He smiled, continuing to avoid the subject of Morton's next hit, still waiting for the proper mood to be established. The third drink would do it. The dapper man's tone was idle. "How do you manage to get those afternoons off when you have a job to do?"

Morton shrugged. "The place is owned by my brother-in-law. He probably thinks I'm sneaking out for a dame." He shook his head. "He doesn't care. He only thinks I'm doing it. I know he is." He took his last drink.

"And you never do?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't." The third drink was already working; Morton smiled. "One woman gives me all the grief I need."

He finished the beer, pushed both glasses from him, and swung about on the stool, facing Reed. The last drink had acted as usual; he seemed calm, thoughtful, almost detached. Jerry stared at him curiously.

"So if your wife gives you grief, and she doesn't know about the money, why not just do a disappearing act? In a town this size you could do it right here and still keep doing jobs for me."

"Oh, Janie isn't so bad," Morton said, and then added patiently, "Besides, I told you. I like the job. Old Thomason—he's the office manager now—isn't going to last forever. Two, three years and I ought to be holding down his job."

Jerry Reed studied the fleshy face a moment. It certainly took all kinds! Yet he knew that no professional gun in New York City could hold a candle to Morton. Nor did any other command—and get—as high a fee. He shrugged.

"About the hit—"

Morton was ready. He relaxed against the bar. "Yes?"

"It's Marcia Collingswood."

"What?" Morton sat straighter, surprised. "But why—" He cut the question off as soon as he started it; only his amazement had made him begin to ask it in the first place. The whys were not his department. "The movie actress? I didn't even know she was in town."

"Well, she is. She's staying at the Hotel Belleville. Room 509."

Morton snorted. "The Belleville? You've got to be kidding! That fleatrap? Kept dames, quick rentals, and floating crap games—I know the place. That's where I hit Quinleven just last month. Remember?"

"I remember," Reed said dryly. "Anyway, that's where she's staying. Incognito."

Morton considered this. "So," he said at last, simply. "Incognito. Except everybody in the world seems to know where she is."

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"Nobody knows where she is. Except you, me, and the man who's paying his good money for the job."

"The Belleville, eh?" Morton considered, then nodded slowly. "Fifth floor . . . Well, that shouldn't be any great chore. When does the curtain go up?"

"Tomorrow evening, between five and six," Reed said.

"Between five and six?" Morton shook his head decisively. "We're doing our annual audit today and tomorrow. I took this afternoon off to come up here and see you, but I told my brother-in-law I'd stay late tomorrow to make up for it. I ask him for tomorrow off, even one minute, and he's going to scream bloody murder." His tone became accusing. "I've just been telling you I've got a job I like and I'd rather not get canned, if you don't mind."

"Tomorrow evening," Reed said with no change in his voice. "Between five and six. She's meeting somebody for cocktails and dinner at seven—or at least she thinks she is—and she's scheduled to fly back to the coast on a midnight flight. But she'll be in her room between five and six, and expecting a caller." He studied Morton calmly. "There'll be a bonus for this one."

The heavy man sighed unhappily. "I'll have to say I'm sick, which means I can't even go back to the office afterwards. Which means I'll not only miss the time at the office, but I'll have to catch the seven o'clock train to Jersey. Which also means I miss the bus, and either wait half an hour, or walk. In all this snow—"

"Tough," Reed said evenly, and came to his feet, indicating the conference was over. He stood while Morton climbed down from the stool, walked Morton to the door, waited while the heavy-set man struggled into his overcoat.

"Marcia Collingswood," Reed said. "Hotel Belleville, Room 509. Between five and six." He didn't give the name under which she was registered; Morton would know her by sight. Actually, the repetition was merely force of habit; George Morton, he knew, had the information stored unforgettably in his mind. He smiled at the heavy man in friendly fashion. "If you make it close enough to five you might still catch your regular train."

"Not a chance," Morton said mournfully, and opened the apartment door. "You ever try to get a cab up near the Belleville at that hour? Even in good weather? Not a hope." He shook his head dispiritedly, and closed the door behind him.

George Morton glanced at his watch and nodded. The smoke-filled bar a block down from the Belleville was infinitely more comfortable than the freezing weather outside—the bar was too warm, in

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fact, since he was standing, one foot on the rail, still wearing his overcoat. But then, he wasn't being paid to be comfortable. He picked up the small change before him, finished his beer, and moved toward the door.

It had begun to sleet heavily when he emerged. Morton smiled faintly. Good! True, he would have greater trouble getting to the station afterward, but at least in this kind of weather heads were bent against the driving wind, eyes buried in coat collars, minds preoccupied with their owners' discomfort rather than the faces of strangers. And, too, the Belleville suited his purpose better than any other hotel he knew. Privacy being the sole reason for the hotel's continued existence, and hence prosperity, the lobby and desk were around a corner from the entranceway, and both the staircase and self-service elevator could be reached without a person necessarily being seen.

Morton paused before the entrance, under the canopy flapping in the icy wind, and glanced through the heavy glass of the swinging doors. The immediate vicinity of the elevator was deserted; the door of the small cab was open, electrically awaiting custom; the light streaming obliquely from it added to the weaker illumination of the corridor.

Morton nodded in satisfaction, pushed through into the area, and stepped quite routinely into the empty elevator, pushing the button for the sixth floor. If one considered walking a flight a necessary precaution, George preferred it to be down rather than up.

The door slid shut; the cab slowly began its whining climb. Morton removed his gloves, opened his overcoat, and brought out a revolver from one jacket pocket and a silencer from another. He carefully screwed the silencer into place, stuffed the lethal assembly into his overcoat pocket, then pulled one glove on. His bare hand was placed into the pocket over the gun, hiding its projection. It made one side of his coat bulge suspiciously, but he knew that the only person who might possibly notice would be in no condition to report it.

At the sixth floor the elevator paused, considered, and then allowed its doors to slide jerkily open. Morton stepped out quite naturally, moving down the hallway with assurance. There was nobody to be seen. From behind most of the doors there was an almost watchful silence, but he did not allow this to disturb him in the least. The other rooms projected muffled music from cheap radios.

Morton pushed beneath the red light illuminating the entrance to the stairway, trotted down the uncarpeted stairs, his face calm and assured. He paused at the fifth-floor landing, glancing through the small glass window set in the upper

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part of the door. Like the sixth floor, the fifth was also deserted; he was not particularly surprised, nor did he allow it to detain him. With a nod he thrust the door aside and walked with confidence to the door marked 509, rapping on it evenly, loud enough but not too loud, with aplomb. Confidence was everything. It removed suspicion from his victims until it was too late; it added to his anonymity in case he was ever noticed. Confidence, but not overconfidence . . .

The door opened. Instantly he recognized the woman facing him, although in person, without make-up, she appeared much older than her publicity photographs. He spoke quickly, before she could recover from her evident surprise at the strange face.

"Miss Collingswood? I'm from the *Daily News*. Chamberly is my name. We heard that you—"

The surprise and disappointment had disappeared; her face had turned hard. "You heard what? What are you doing here? If I wanted to see reporters I wouldn't be staying at this—this—"

She clamped her jaws shut, starting to close the door. It caught on his heavy shoe, wedged in the opening.

George Morton was extremely apologetic. The important thing was that nobody appear from another room, or from the elevator, before he gained entrance.

"Look, Miss Collingswood, we're a newspaper. I've got an editor who eats reporters alive. When a good story breaks—"

"Take your foot out of the door. Do you hear?" Her white face studied his for a moment and seemed to see something in it. She came to a decision. "If you don't I'm going to call the desk and have them send a policeman up here. And if you print one word about my being here, I'll deny it and sue your newspaper for more money than it's got. Do you hear? Is that clear?"

The foot remained. "Look, Miss Collingswood—"

But the girl had had enough. She marched to the small table beside the bed, swinging about to hide the sight of him, reaching for the telephone. Morton stepped inside, closing the door quickly behind him. Her hand didn't have time to raise the receiver; he shot her through the nape of the neck, and then once more, slightly higher, even as the body was crumpling helplessly to the bed. The only sounds were the diffident coughs of the silencer.

Morton unscrewed the silencer, put the gun in one jacket pocket and the silencer in the other, and walked to the door, pressing his ear against the thin panel. He didn't even look back. He could hear no voices; he straightened up, buttoning his overcoat, slipping on the other glove. He opened the door slowly, calmly, walking out

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and carelessly closing it behind him. The elevator was in use, the pointer moving. He walked to the stairway, backing into the door to open it, and then trotted down the steps.

The entranceway was empty when he made the last turn at the final landing and descended to the street level. He stared through the glass with a frown. The sleet had stopped beating down, but the hazards of walking were evident in the figures lurching past. The seven o'clock train? He'd probably be lucky to make even the eight o'clock!

He pulled his coat collar up over his ears and pushed his way to the street. A thin figure, face hooded in a fur collar, hunched in the protection of the doorway, partially blocked his passage. He pushed past and then heard the familiar voice.

"Hello, George."

He swung about, staring, and then smiled in unbelieving amazement. Whatever had brought Janie to the city that day, she couldn't have picked a better time, because no matter where she went, Janie always drove. So she'd have the car, and slippery or not, a car was always better than walking. His smile suddenly faded. Janie? Here?

"Janie! What are you doing here?" A further question came to him, disturbing, inexplicable. "And how did you know where I was?"

"Because I followed you here about a month ago when I called you at the office and my brother said you were going to be away for the afternoon." Her voice was spiteful, scathing. "I followed you from the office when you left. And when I called to talk to you today and my brother told me he was fed up with your taking time off, I knew where you were. Do you understand? *I knew!*"

She stared up at him, her thin face almost wolfish. "I know what kind of hotel this is. You think I'm a fool, but I know what goes on here—"

"But you don't understand, Janie—"

She fumbled in her purse as for a handkerchief; her hand emerged with a small gun. Morton stared at her incredulously. She raised the weapon evenly.

"I said—I know—what kind—of hotel—this is."

Her words were soft although half strangled, punctuated by the sharp splat of the gun. Morton's eyes had widened in amazement at the sight of the weapon; now they suddenly squeezed closed.

Two bullets drove him back inexorably, relentlessly; he struck the glass doors leading into the hotel as if in relief for their support, collapsing, sliding slowly down to the small step before the entrance, then leaning sideways as if resting against the doorjamb, lifeless.

She moved to him, bending over

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the rigid figure with its grotesquely open mouth, oblivious of the tableau of startled spectators frozen in their tracks by the sight, oblivious of the shrill whistle from the corner of the street and the figure of the policeman running toward her, sliding, slipping; oblivious of everything but her all-consuming bitterness and her recognition of her failure as a woman. The revolver dangled from her hand, unnoticed, like an admonishing finger, scolding.

"And you've been drinking, too," she said, and suddenly began to cry.

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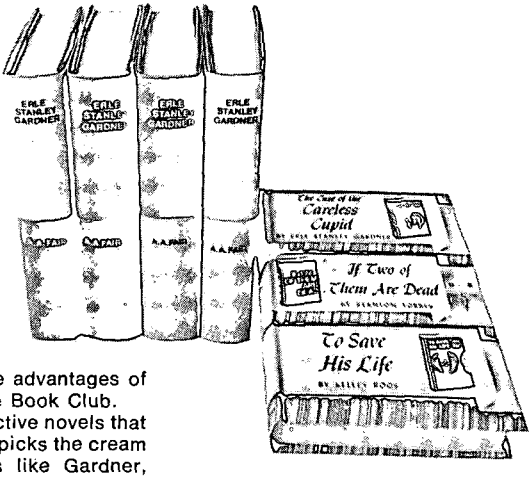

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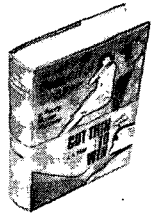

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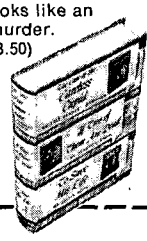

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